



**DEA**  
Drug  
Enforcement  
Administration



# Drug-Impaired Driving

## What You Should Know



**Photo:** The driver of the car on the right, a 43-year-old male, tested positive for marijuana, cocaine, benzodiazepines, and opiates at the time of the accident, killing a 31-year old woman and injuring her three children. The driver received a ten-year prison sentence for aggravated vehicular homicide. *Courtesy photo by Hope Taft, Ohio State Highway Patrol, Ohio National Guard.*

**What is impaired driving?** Any amount of a substance that impairs one's ability to operate a motor vehicle, react in a timely manner, and impairs one's judgement and attention as to other drivers and vehicles. The most common substances detected in impaired drivers are alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, and over-the-counter medications.

**Why is drug-impaired driving so dangerous?** Drug intoxication alters perception, mental processes, attention, balance, coordination, reaction time, and other abilities required for safe driving. With lesser reaction time and impaired judgement, crashes are more likely to occur which could result in injury or even death.

## What substances are used the most when driving?

After alcohol, marijuana is the drug most often linked to car crashes, including those involving deaths. A nationwide study of deadly crashes found that almost 37 percent of drivers who tested positive for drugs had used marijuana.

*Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse, [www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/drugged-driving](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/drugged-driving)*

## How dangerous is marijuana-impaired driving?

In Washington State, researchers conducted voluntary anonymous drug tests of drivers via oral and blood tests, and found that more drivers tested THC-positive one year after implementation of the retail sales law than immediately before. Statistically significant increases were observed among daytime drivers, where that rate more than doubled one year after retail legalization was implemented (7.8 percent vs. 18.9 percent).

*Source: Marijuana, Other Drugs, and Alcohol Use by Drivers in Washington State. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, July 2016.*

## Did you know?

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in 2017, 21.4 million people aged 16 or older drove under the influence of alcohol in the past year, and 12.8 million people drove under the influence of illicit drugs.

*Source: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. Results from the 2017 National Survey on Drugs Use and Health: Detailed Tables. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018.*

## More facts:

- Every day, almost 29 people in the U.S. die in alcohol-impaired vehicle crashes – that’s one person every 50 minutes in 2016.

- Alcohol-impaired motor vehicle crashes cost more than an estimated \$44 billion annually.

*Source: [www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drun-driving](http://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drun-driving)*

- Marijuana-related traffic deaths increased 151 percent in the 5-year average (2013-2017) since Colorado legalized recreational marijuana.

*Source: The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado: The Impact, Rocky Mountain High Drug Trafficking Area, September 2018.*

***For drug prevention information,  
visit DEA’s websites:***

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