

Marijuana and Driving

Definition: The term “drugged driving” refers to operating a motor vehicle while impaired by any type of drug or medication, or a combination of drugs, medication, and alcohol.

Q: How is drugged driving related to marijuana?

A: Marijuana (also known as cannabis) is a widely used drug, particularly among young people. Marijuana use among Canadian youth has steadily increased to approximately 30% of those in grades 7 to 12 and 47% of 18 to 19 year olds report using marijuana. There is a growing concern about the effect of marijuana on road safety as marijuana is the illegal drug most frequently associated with drugged driving.

Q: Why is driving under the influence of marijuana a problem?

A: While impaired driving by alcohol is a significant issue causing many motor vehicle accidents and fatalities each year, driving under the influence of marijuana also increases the risk to public safety.

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active chemical ingredient in marijuana, can significantly impair driving performance up to 24 hours after use. Marijuana can decrease reaction times, distort time and distance estimations, cause sleepiness, impair motor skills, and decrease concentration. The drug may also impair one’s ability to properly control a vehicle.

While marijuana impairs driving ability, research has indicated that even more severe impairment results when it is combined with alcohol. Drivers impaired by both alcohol and marijuana have a 36% reduction in their reaction time, and have an impairment equal to a blood alcohol level of .14; far above the legal limit of .08.

**One third of all
Canadian
teenagers aged
12 -19 have
smoked
marijuana more
than once in
their lifetime**

*(Health Canada,
2003)*

**Visit
www.cannabisfacts.ca
to view a video
on an
experimental
driving test
with a drug
impaired driver**

41% of teenagers say they are not concerned about getting into a car with a driver who has been using drugs

(Everson, 2006)

Males are 3.5 times more likely than females to drive under the influence of cannabis

MADD Canada, 2008

Q: How big of a problem is “drugged driving”?

A: Over 6,000 impaired driving cases are processed through the British Columbia court system every year. While less than 1% of these are for drug impairment, police statistics suggest that one-third of suspected impaired drivers who are given a 24-hour licence suspension are impaired by drugs. In Canada, it is estimated that 3.4% of accident fatalities and 1.7% of injuries are a result of drug impairment while driving. Among students aged 16 to 18, approximately 15% who used marijuana drove while under the influence compared to 12% who used alcohol.

Q: Is drugged driving illegal? Can I get in legal trouble for it?

A: New laws have recently been implemented in Canada enabling police officers to demand blood, urine, or saliva samples when they suspect a driver is impaired by drugs. The new legislation took effect July 2, 2008. These laws also increased the mandatory fines imposed on those found guilty of impaired driving. Drivers will be subjected to a mandatory \$1,000 fine for their first offence, a sentence of 30 days in jail for a second offence, and a 120 day jail sentence for their third offence.

For more information and resources, contact the B.C. Centre for Social Responsibility (www.bccsr.ca) at (604) 870-5940.

Resources

- Department of Justice. <http://www.gov.bc.ca/ag/>
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving. http://www.madd.ca/english/research/youth_and_impaired_driving_2006.pdf
- Parent Action on Drugs. <http://www.parentactionondrugs.org/>
- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. www.ccsa.ca
- Health Canada http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/adp-apd/straight_facts-faits_mefaits/drug_use-consommation_drogues-eng.php
- Article by Darah Hansen in The Vancouver Sun, “Police can now demand blood, urine or saliva samples of suspect drivers” <http://www.canada.com/vancouver/news/story.html?id=4a2ad7d2-184c-4beb-913d-00b6313d1c39>