

Impaired Driving



What Is Impaired Driving?

Impaired driving is driving a vehicle while impaired due to the intoxicating effects of recent alcohol or drug use.

Is Impaired Driving Dangerous?

Yes. Impaired driving can make driving a car unsafe. It puts the driver, passengers, and others who share the road at serious risk. Impaired drivers can't accurately assess their own impairment – which is why no one should drive after using any impairing substances.

What Substances Cause Impaired Driving?

Many substances can impair driving, including alcohol, some over-the-counter and prescription drugs, and illegal drugs.

- Impaired driving is driving a vehicle while impaired due to the intoxicating effects of recent alcohol or drug use.
 - Alcohol, illegal drugs, and some over-the-counter and prescription drugs can cause impaired driving.
 - Driving impaired by any substance—alcohol or drugs, whether legal or illegal—is against the law.
 - If a person uses an impairing substance, they should designate a sober driver, call a cab, or use a ride-hailing service.
 - Parents or caregivers of adolescents are encouraged to talk to them about the dangers of impaired driving.
- Alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs impair the ability to drive because they slow coordination, judgment, and reaction times.
 - Cocaine and methamphetamine can make drivers more aggressive and reckless.
 - Using two or more drugs at the same time, including alcohol, can amplify the impairing effects of each drug a person has consumed.
 - Some prescription and over-the-counter medicines can cause extreme drowsiness, dizziness, and other side effects. Read and follow all warning labels before driving, and note that warnings against “operating heavy machinery” include driving a vehicle.

What Populations Are Especially Affected By Impaired Driving?

- **Adolescents** are less experienced and are more likely than other drivers to underestimate or not recognize dangerous situations. They are also more likely to speed and allow less distance between vehicles. When lack of driving experience is combined with alcohol or drug use, the results can be tragic. Car crashes are the leading cause of death among young people aged 16 to 19 years.

Is Impaired Driving Illegal?

Yes. Driving impaired by any substance—alcohol or drugs, whether legal or illegal—is against the law in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Law enforcement officers are trained to observe drivers' behavior and to identify impaired drivers. Even in states where marijuana laws have changed, it is still illegal to drive under the influence of the drug.



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800.232.4424 (phone)
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A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Is It Safe To Drive After Having One Drink?

Alcohol is a substance that reduces the function of the brain, impairing thinking, reasoning and muscle coordination. All these abilities are essential to operating a vehicle safely.

As alcohol levels rise in a person's system, the negative effects on the central nervous system increase, too. Alcohol is absorbed directly through the walls of the stomach and small intestine. It then passes into the bloodstream where it accumulates until it is metabolized by the liver. Alcohol level is measured by the weight of the alcohol in a certain volume of blood. This is called Blood Alcohol Concentration, or BAC.

At a BAC of .08 grams of alcohol per deciliter (g/dL) of blood, crash risk increases exponentially. Because of this risk, it's illegal in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to drive with a BAC of .08 or higher. However, even a small amount of alcohol can affect driving ability. In 2018, there were 1,878 people killed in alcohol-related crashes where drivers had BACs of .01 to .07 g/dL.

In Connecticut, if you are 21 years of age or over, you are considered to be legally intoxicated if you have a BAC of .08 or higher. If you are under age 21 you are legally intoxicated at a .02 BAC or higher.

What Can Be Done To Prevent Impaired Driving?

People can save lives by making smarter choices. They can:

- Designate a sober driver, call a cab, or use a ride-hailing service if using impairing substances.
- Stop friends from getting behind the wheel if they're under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Make sure all guests attending a party where impairing substances are used leave with a sober driver.
- Always wear a seat belt—it's the best defense against impaired drivers.

Parents or caregivers of adolescents can:

- Talk to their kids about the dangers of impaired driving. They should not wait for the "right time" —it's always a good time to talk to kids about the dangers of impaired driving.
- Make sure their children know what they expect from them when it comes to impaired driving. They should let their kids know it's never okay to get behind the wheel of a motor vehicle while under the influence and that getting in a car with someone who has been drinking or using drugs is also dangerous.
- Help them build an exit plan. Some kids may not know what to do if a friend or family member who is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs offers them a ride. Parents or caregivers can explain to their child that it's okay to say no and help them think through an exit strategy.
- Show their kids they care. Parents and caregivers can make sure their children know that they are talking to them about impaired driving because they care about their safety, not because they assume their children would ever drive drunk or drug-impaired driving.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental
Health and Addiction Services

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

24/7 Access Line

1.800.563.4086

CT Department of
Transportation

www.ct.gov/DOT

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

www.madd.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2018 www.samhsa.gov

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration www.nhtsa.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse 2019 www.drugabuse.gov

CT Department of Transportation <https://portal.ct.gov/DOT>

