

Special points of interest:

- Marijuana is the most prevalent illegal drug detected in impaired drivers.
- 34 percent of motor vehicle crash victims admitted to a Maryland trauma center tested positive for “drugs only”.
- Boys and girls reporting average grades of B- or lower were more likely to drive after illicit drug use or heavy drinking.

INSIGHTS: on substance abuse is a monthly newsletter providing brief information on current issues in substance use, abuse and treatment.

The information contained within this newsletter is a compilation of opinions and expresses one or more of the many views on the subject.

If you have specific questions regarding substance abuse please contact Recovery Pointe for more information.

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INSIGHTS: on substance abuse™

Drugged Driving

Drugged driving is a public health concern because it puts not only the driver at risk, but also passengers and others who share the road.

While there are many definitions of drugged driving the simplest and perhaps most accurate is operating a motor vehicle when any detectable level of a drug or its metabolites "renders the driver incapable of driving safely" or "causes the driver to be impaired."

The principal concern regarding drugged driving is that driving under the influence of any drug that acts on the brain could impair one's motor skills, reaction time, and judgment.

According to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 10.2 million people age 12 and older reported driving under

the influence of illicit drugs during the year prior to being surveyed. In addition, in 2006, an estimated 13.3 percent of persons age 12 and older drove under the influence of an illicit drug or alcohol at least once in the past year.

In recent years, drugs other than alcohol that act on the brain have increasingly been recognized as hazards to road traffic safety. Overall, the research indicates that marijuana is the most prevalent illegal drug detected in impaired drivers, fatally injured drivers, and motor vehicle crash victims. Other drugs also implicated include benzodiazepines, cocaine, opiates, and amphetamines.

A number of studies have examined illicit drug use in drivers involved in motor vehicle crashes, reckless



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driving, or fatal accidents. One study found that about 34 percent of motor vehicle crash victims admitted to a Maryland trauma center tested positive for “drugs only”; about 16 percent tested positive for “alcohol only.” Approximately 9.9 percent (or 1 in 10) tested positive for alcohol and drugs, and within this group, 50 percent were younger than age 18.

High School Seniors Report Alcohol or Drug-Impaired Driving Experiences



A NIDA study suggests about one in three high school seniors has, in a 2-week period, either driven a vehicle after drinking alcohol or taking illegal drugs or ridden as a passenger with a driver under the influence of those substances

Although the prevalence of alcohol- or drug-impaired

driving and riding has declined over the 6 years, from 35 percent in 2001 to 30 percent in 2006, the problem remains serious and widespread.

Lifestyle factors and, to a lesser degree, gender and race influence the likelihood of engaging in the risky behaviors.

Seniors not living with at least one parent were more

likely to drive after heavy drinking; seniors with the most highly educated parents were less likely to do so.

Boys were slightly more likely than girls to drive after using an illicit drug or to ride with a driver who had. Boys and girls reporting average grades of B- or lower were more likely to drive after illicit drug use or heavy drinking.

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Impairment increases significantly when marijuana use is combined with alcohol

Marijuana and Driving

THC affects areas of the brain that control the body's movements, balance, coordination, memory, and judgment, as well as sensations. Because these effects are multifaceted, more research is required to understand marijuana's impact on the ability of drivers to react to complex and unpredictable situations. However, we do know that:

- A meta-analysis of approximately 60 experimental studies, including laboratory,

driving simulator, and on-road experiments, found that behavioral and cognitive skills related to driving performance were impaired in a dose-dependent fashion with increasing THC blood levels.

- Evidence from both real and simulated driving studies indicates that marijuana can negatively affect a driver's attentiveness, perception of time and speed, and the ability to draw on

information obtained from past experiences.

- Research shows that impairment increases significantly when marijuana use is combined with alcohol.
- Studies have found that many drivers who test positive for alcohol also test positive for THC, making it clear that drinking and drugged driving are often linked behaviors.

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