

Marijuana & Driving

Why It's a Problem



Safe driving requires the motor vehicle operator to be in control of body movements, balance, coordination, memory, and judgment. Alcohol, some prescription medications, and marijuana all have the potential to impair a person's driving skills.

Though many users may claim that marijuana does not affect their ability to drive, scientific and clinical evidence proves otherwise. Marijuana's main ingredient, THC or tetrahydrocannabinol, has been shown to affect a person's ability to make decisions, react quickly, problem solve, and coordinate their limbs.¹

The use of marijuana also can distort perception and lead to memory loss. Plus, using marijuana with alcohol greatly increases the risk of impaired driving than either alcohol or marijuana by itself.²

THC Levels

As more and more states legalize both medical and recreational marijuana, the risk of driving while impaired by marijuana is becoming a growing problem.

Researchers have found a direct relationship between THC levels in the blood and impaired driving ability. Although it's unclear whether marijuana increases overall crash rates since marijuana can be detected in bodily fluids for days or weeks after use, meta-analyses of multiple studies did show that drivers with THC in their blood are:³

- **Twice as likely** to have a fatal crash
- **Three to seven times more likely** to be responsible for a driving incident than drivers who have not used drugs or alcohol
- **At double (or more) risk** of being involved in a collision after use

Driving High

A 2019 study of medical marijuana users found that 1 in 5 said they had driven "very high," while 56% admitted to getting behind the wheel of a vehicle within two hours of taking a dose.⁴

Field Sobriety Testing

When a police officer pulls over a suspected impaired driver, the person may be given a field sobriety test. Field sobriety tests for alcohol, which may include a one-leg stand test or a walk-and-turn test do not work as well for marijuana intoxication. Nor is there a breathalyzer-type test for marijuana.

Signs of marijuana intoxication are not always evident, either. General signs of marijuana impairment include red eyes, poor coordination, delayed reaction time, distorted sense of surrounding, dizziness, and drowsiness.

Blood and urine samples may determine whether there is THC in a person's blood but laws about when and how these can be collected vary state to state. Also, these tests may not be accurate since THC (especially in chronic users) can still be detected several weeks after stopping use.

In another study, researchers found that using marijuana recreationally affects driving ability – **even when users are not intoxicated**. In a simulated driving exercise, one of the world’s most foremost experts in the cognitive effects on marijuana, Staci Gruber, PhD, found that in spite of not being intoxicated and not using marijuana for at least 12 hours:⁵

“Marijuana users hit more pedestrians, exceeded the speed limit more often, made fewer stops at red lights, and made more center line crossings.”

Risks

Driving high is a form of impaired driving. It is not safe to drive while under the influence of marijuana, putting you at risk of:

- Motor vehicle accidents
- Being arrested, fined, and your licensed suspended
- Harming or killing yourself or someone else
- Having a record as a convicted criminal

Ohio Law

Ohio police officers are becoming trained as certified drug-recognition experts. Using a 12-step drug evaluation and classification protocol, these officers can assess whether a driver is under the influence of marijuana or other drugs. The evaluation may include a breath alcohol test, interview, eye exam, field sobriety tests, and blood, saliva, or urine tests.

In order to determine “legal impairment,” Ohio has set levels known as per se that define the legal limits of THC which may be present in a driver’s blood stream. They are:

- Blood: ≥ 12 ng per ml
- Urine: ≥ 10 ng per ml

Remember: If you intend to drive, the safest option is the simplest one: **Do not use marijuana and drive.**

About This Campaign

Because much of the public conversation surrounding marijuana has been based on anecdotes rather than science, Prevention Action Alliance and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services created this campaign to help people better understand the facts about marijuana and its effects.

If you found this article helpful, we encourage you to share it with others. You can also find other fact sheets about marijuana at: preventionactionalliance.org/marijuana

If you have concerns about your own use of marijuana or a loved one’s, and wish to seek help, go to: findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

Contact Us

For more information on marijuana, please contact us at:
Prevention Action Alliance
(614) 540-9985
preventionactionalliance.org

About Us

Prevention
Action Alliance

Prevention Action Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit located in Columbus, Ohio. We’re dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Learn more at preventionactionalliance.org.



The mission of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) is to provide statewide leadership on the topics of mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery. Learn more about OhioMHAS at mha.ohio.gov.

1. cdc.gov/marijuana/factsheets/driving.htm
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4. aarp.org/health/drugs-supplements/info-2019/cannabis-driving.html
5. sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/01/200114123521.htm