

Drugs and Driving: What We Know and What We Don't

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**Drugged Driving Call to Action
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In the next 7 minutes

- ▶ Data – what's known about drugs and driving
 - Marijuana and opioids
- ▶ Key gaps
 - Research: What we'd like to know
 - Programs: What we can do

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DRUG- IMPAIRED DRIVING

A GUIDE FOR STATES



Americans use drugs

- ▶ **Marijuana**
 - Recreational use legal in 9 states and DC
 - Medical use legal in 29 states and DC
 - 22 million users – about 8% of population over age 12
- ▶ **Opioids:** prescription (OxyContin, Vicodyn), heroin, fentanyl, ...
 - 249 million prescriptions in 2015, about 38% of all adults
 - 11.5 million people misuse prescription opioids
 - 116 deaths daily from opioid overdose
- ▶ **Stimulants:** cocaine, amphetamines
- ▶ **Depressants:** barbiturates, tranquilizers (Valium, Prozak)
- ▶ **Hallucinogens:** LSD, Ecstasy
- ▶ **Anesthetics:** PCP

Drivers use drugs

- ▶ **Fatally-injured drivers** (FARS, known drug test results, 2016)
 - 44% drug-positive
 - Marijuana the most common drug: 41% of the drug-positive drivers
 - 38% alcohol-positive
- ▶ **Drivers on the road** (NHTSA roadside survey, 2013-14)
 - 22% drug-positive, both weekday days and weekend nights
 - Marijuana the most common drug: 9% of all drivers weekday days; 12% weekend nights
 - Alcohol: 1% weekday days, 8% weekend nights
- ▶ **But presence doesn't mean impairment**

Drugs can impair

- ▶ Marijuana
 - Impairs attention, time and distance perception, reaction time, coordination, ...
- ▶ Opioids
 - Impair cognitive function, cause drowsiness
- ▶ Stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens
 - Their names tell it all

Drugs can increase crash risk

- ▶ Some crashes caused by marijuana and opioids
 - Hard questions: How many crashes? Crash risk?
- ▶ Marijuana
 - Many studies, many with flaws
 - Consensus: increases crash risk by 25-35%
- ▶ Opioids
 - Fewer studies, similar flaws
 - Consensus: increase crash risk somewhat

State drugged driving laws inconsistent

- ▶ All drugs, all states: illegal to drive while impaired
- ▶ Marijuana
 - 12 states: zero tolerance for drivers – no measureable marijuana
 - 6 states: *per se* limits from 1 to 5 ng THC
- ▶ Opioids
 - 19 states: zero tolerance for some opioids
 - 2 states: *per se* limits for some opioids

Alcohol framework doesn't apply to drugs

▶ Alcohol

- Alcohol in blood or breath (BAC) = alcohol in brain = impairment = crash risk; basis of *per se* law
- BAC declines gradually after drinking
- Familiar impairment signs; easy to screen at roadside (SFST)
- Breath test provides BAC evidence

▶ Drugs

- Drug in blood or urine \neq drug in brain \neq impairment \neq crash risk
- THC declines quickly after use; marijuana metabolites present for weeks
- Different drugs produce different impairment signs
- Blood or urine test necessary to confirm drug presence

Research and program needs

▶ Research

- Better data: drugs in impaired driving arrests and crashes
- Better crash risk estimates for marijuana and opioids
- Quick, cheap ways to detect drugs at the roadside
 - Oral fluid; breath for marijuana
- Better process to measure drugs in drivers

▶ Programs

- Educate the public, physicians, pharmacists
- Train law enforcement: ARIDE, DEC
- Inform prosecutors and judges
- Standard drug test protocols
- Encourage drug screening and treatment

Questions

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