



## Drivers Over .08 BAC Pose a Serious Traffic Safety Problem

Alcohol decreases a person’s ability to drive a motor vehicle safely. The more you drink, the greater the effect. The amount of alcohol required to become impaired differs according to how fast you drink, your weight, your gender, and how much food you have in your stomach. The chart below contains some of the more common symptoms people exhibit at various blood alcohol concentrations (BAC), and the probable effects on driving ability.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (g/dL) <sup>1</sup>	Typical Effects	Predictable Effects on Driving
<b>.02</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some loss of judgment</li> <li>Relaxation</li> <li>Slight body warmth</li> <li>Altered mood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decline in visual functions (rapid tracking of a moving target)</li> <li>Decline in ability to perform two tasks at the same time (divided attention)</li> </ul>
<b>.05</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exaggerated behavior</li> <li>May have loss of small-muscle control (e.g., focusing your eyes)</li> <li>Impaired judgment</li> <li>Usually good feeling</li> <li>Lowered alertness</li> <li>Release of inhibition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced coordination</li> <li>Reduced ability to track moving objects</li> <li>Difficulty steering</li> <li>Reduced response to emergency driving situations</li> </ul>
<b>.08</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muscle coordination becomes poor (e.g., balance, speech, vision, reaction time, and hearing)</li> <li>Harder to detect danger</li> <li>Judgment, self-control, reasoning, and memory are impaired</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concentration</li> <li>Short-term memory loss</li> <li>Speed control</li> <li>Reduced information processing capability (e.g., signal detection, visual search)</li> <li>Impaired perception</li> </ul>
<b>.10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear deterioration of reaction time and control</li> <li>Slurred speech, poor coordination, and slowed thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced ability to maintain lane position and brake appropriately</li> </ul>
<b>.15</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Far less muscle control than normal</li> <li>Vomiting may occur (unless this level is reached slowly or a person has developed a tolerance for alcohol)</li> <li>Major loss of balance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substantial impairment in vehicle control, attention to driving task, and in necessary visual and auditory information processing</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Information in this table shows the BAC level at which the effect usually is first observed, and has been gathered from a variety of sources including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the American Medical Association, the National Commission Against Drunk Driving, and www.webMD.com.

### Why Do States Set a .08 BAC Limit?

Every State has passed a law making it illegal to drive with a BAC of .08 grams per deciliter or higher. A driver also can be arrested with a BAC below .08 g/dL when a law enforcement officer has probable cause, based on the driver’s behavior.

While some impairment may be experienced after a single drink, virtually everyone is far too impaired to drive safely at a BAC of .08 g/dL.

In single-vehicle crashes, the relative risk of a driver with a BAC between .08 and .10 is at least 11 times greater than for drivers with BACs of zero, and 52 times greater for young males.

### Who Drives at .08 BAC or Higher?

While the impaired driving problem isn’t confined to a single group, drivers involved in fatal crashes with BAC levels of .08 g/dL or more tend to be younger men. The 21- to 34-year-old age group is at particularly high risk.

Impaired drivers also tend to have other high-risk behaviors. For example, the following chart shows that drivers with BACs of .08 or higher in fatal crashes are 8 times more likely to have previous DWI convictions than drivers with no alcohol.

Previous Driving Records of Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, by BAC, 2009

