

# DRUG-IMPAIRED DRIVING

## IN THE UNITED STATES



# 12.6 MILLION

Americans reported driving under the influence of marijuana or other illicit drugs in 2018.<sup>1</sup>

Driving while impaired is illegal in the United States. Impaired driving happens when someone operates a vehicle while impaired by a substance like marijuana, other illicit drugs, some prescribed or over-the-counter medicines, or alcohol. Polysubstance use (using more than one drug or using drugs and alcohol together) also makes driving dangerous.

## WHAT WE KNOW

Driving while impaired by any substance can be deadly. We know a lot about alcohol's effects on driving.\* However, we need more research to fully understand the impacts of drug use and polysubstance use on crash injuries and deaths. One research challenge is distinguishing between **presence of** drugs and **impairment by** drugs in the body.

Driving while impaired by any substance can be deadly.



Marijuana



Other Illicit Drugs



Prescription and Over-the-Counter Meds



Alcohol

\* This fact sheet focuses on drug-impaired driving. For information about alcohol-impaired driving, please visit [www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired\\_driving](http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving).



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
National Center for Injury  
Prevention and Control

*Working together, we can help keep people safe on the road—every day.*

# Promising Strategies to Help Address Drug-Impaired Driving

Strategies to address alcohol-impaired driving are well known. Less is known about effective strategies to reduce drug- and polysubstance-impaired driving. See the examples below of roadside strategies that states are using to address drug-impaired driving.

## Short-Term High-Visibility Enforcement of Impaired Driving Laws

Short-term high-visibility enforcement (HVE) of impaired driving laws involves a brief period of increased police efforts, including sobriety checkpoints or saturation patrols (an increased number of officers patrolling a specific area). An effective HVE approach combines law enforcement with paid and earned media to increase awareness of the effort.<sup>2</sup>



By the Numbers

**Publicized sobriety checkpoints are authorized in 38 states and Washington, D.C., as of February 2020.<sup>2,3</sup>**

## Drug Recognition Experts

Drug recognition experts (DREs) are law enforcement officers trained to identify drug-impaired driving using a 12-step, standardized evaluation that includes behavioral tests and physical assessments.<sup>4</sup>

The DRE evaluation includes breath alcohol testing, eye exams, muscle tone exams, tests such as the One Leg Stand, and other behavioral and physical observations.<sup>4,5</sup> Blood or urine samples are collected and analyzed if there is sufficient evidence that a driver is impaired by a drug other than or in addition to alcohol.<sup>4</sup>



By the Numbers

**As of December 2019, there were 9,878 certified DREs active throughout all 50 states and Washington, D.C. In 2019, states reported 49,905 DRE evaluations.<sup>6</sup>**



## NEXT STEPS FOR ADDRESSING DRUG-IMPAIRED DRIVING

Actions that could advance understanding of drug and polysubstance-impaired driving and assist states and communities with prevention efforts include:

- development, evaluation, and further implementation of strategies to prevent alcohol, drug, and polysubstance-impaired driving.
- standardized testing for alcohol and drugs among impaired drivers and drivers involved in fatal crashes. Adequate resources for toxicology laboratories are required for such testing.

### REFERENCES

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For more information about impaired driving, visit [www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired\\_driving](http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving).