

Additional Information

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The statistics for motor vehicle crashes and impairment-related crashes among young drivers are alarming.

- Young people have the highest rates of traffic death and injury per capita among all age groups and the highest death rate per kilometre driven among all drivers under 75 years of age. More 19-year-olds die or are seriously injured than any other age group.
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 16 to 25 year olds, and alcohol and/or drug impairment is a factor in 55% of those crashes.
- 16-25 year olds constituted 13.6% of the population in 2010, but made up almost 33.4 % of the alcohol-related traffic deaths.

Studies conclude that young drivers are over-represented in road crashes for two primary reasons: inexperience and immaturity. Although young people are the least likely to drive impaired, the ones who do are at very high risk of collision.

Driving while impaired by drugs is also a serious concern. Canadians between 14-25 years old have one of the highest rates cannabis use in the world. It's the drug they use most after alcohol. Most young people see cannabis as a benign drug, far less dangerous than alcohol. They think driving under the influence of cannabis is risk free, despite the evidence that shows cannabis can shorten attention span, alter perception of time and distance and slow reaction times – all of which impair the driver's ability to respond to sudden events in traffic.

Drug-Impaired Driving

Population surveys show the number of Canadians driving after using drugs is on the rise. In fact, driving after smoking cannabis is now more prevalent among some younger drivers than driving after drinking. Survey data from a 2013 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health report showed that, among young Ontario drivers in grades 10 – 12, 4% per cent drove after drinking while 9.7% drove after smoking cannabis.

Equally concerning as the numbers is the misperception that many young people, and some parents, have that driving under the influence of cannabis is safer than driving under the influence of alcohol. A national study by the Partnership for a Drug-Free Canada revealed:

- Nearly one third (32%) of teens did not consider driving under the influence of cannabis to be as bad as alcohol.
- Nearly 25% of parents of teenagers did not consider driving while high on cannabis to be as bad as drinking and driving.

Many young people think driving under the influence of cannabis is risk-free. Yet studies have shown that smoking cannabis can produce unwelcome effects behind the wheel, including a shorter attention span, an altered perception of time and distances, and slower reaction times that impair the driver's ability to respond to sudden events in traffic. A 2012 study by researchers at Dalhousie University in Halifax found that smoking cannabis three hours before driving nearly doubled a driver's risk of having a motor vehicle crash.

Combining cannabis with even small amounts of alcohol greatly increases the negative impact on driving skills.

Many young people also think that they will never be caught or charged for driving high. While detecting cannabis is more challenging than detecting alcohol, a roadside drug test similar to the alcohol breathalyzer, can be used to determine whether a driver is impaired by drugs. The standard field sobriety test and the drug recognition evaluation allow police to determine if a driver is under the influence of drugs based on their behaviour and task-related tests. Furthermore, driving while high results in the same type of Criminal Code charges and penalties as driving while drunk.

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