The Truth
Youth and Drug-Impaired Driving

Background

Some drugs, including cannabis, can impair your ability to drive and increase the risk of collisions. In Canada, the number of drivers killed in motor vehicle crashes who test positive for drugs exceeds the number of drivers who test positive for alcohol. Young people continue to be the largest group of drivers who die in crashes and later test positive for alcohol and/or drugs.

Did you know that impaired driving is a leading cause of death and injury in Canada?

This resource provides information about the effects of drugs on a person’s ability to drive. Have the conversation with your children and support them in making informed decisions about their driving behaviour.

Drug-Impaired Driving

Drugs (legal, illegal or prescription) can affect us in many ways. Even small amounts can increase your chances of being involved in a motor vehicle collision. Different drugs have different effects on your brain and body, and can impair the ability to drive by:

- Impairing concentration
- Reducing the ability to drive safely
- Causing a poor time and space perception
- Reducing the ability to divide attention
- Reducting the ability to adjust speed and adapt to change
- Impairing short-term memory
- Reducing the ability to divide attention
- Impairing concentration
- Impairing balance and coordination
- Increasing risk-taking behaviour

Central nervous system depressants can slow down brain activity causing drowsiness and can cause slurred speech. They can also cause other uncoordinated movements.

Hallucinogens e.g., LSD, ecstasy, oxtol, speed, pot

Hallucinogens can distort sensory messages to the brain—they can alter taste, sight, hearing, smell and feeling. These drugs can impair decision-making, memory, perception and the ability to control speed and adapt to change. The central nervous system stimulants e.g., cocaine, meth, crystal meth, speed, Ritalin

Central nervous system stimulants can cause a person to be hyperactive, talkative, agitated. Stimulants accelerate the activity in the brain and the body. This may result in the inability to focus and distract attention, and an increase in risk-taking.

Narcotic analgesics e.g., oxycodone, fentanyl, heroin, methadone, codeine

Narcotic analgesics can cause drowsiness, slow blood flow, loss of coordination and poor muscle control. They can also cause permanent brain damage.

Cannabis/Marijuana

Cannabis use affects cognitive and motor abilities. A driver under the effects of cannabis may be drowsy, drive slower, have pinpoint pupils, lack coordination, have unresponsive behaviours, hallucinations and an inability to focus and concentrate. The effects of cannabis depend on several factors, such as the type of cannabis used, how much a person takes.

- Impairing short-term memory
- Reducing the ability to divide attention
- Causing a poor time and space perception

Prevention

To help young people make informed choices and reduce the risks associated with drug-impaired driving:

- Be a positive role model;
- Know the facts! Young people are doing their own research, especially online—not all of what they find is true;
- Actively encourage youth to drive sober and to make healthy life choices that will enable them to reach their personal goals.
- Stay the night if possible and safe to do so.
- Use alternative modes of transportation (public transportation, taxi, friend or family member);
- Designate a driver;
- Activate youth to drive sober and to make healthy life choices that will enable them to reach their personal goals.

Providing youth with alternative to driving impaired or getting in the car with someone who is impaired:

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For more information

RCMP Centre for Youth Crime Prevention
rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cycp-cpcj

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction
ccsa.ca

Government of Canada

In collaboration with...