



Cannabis Impaired Driving

As young drivers prepare to take to the roads again to get back to their schools, colleges, and universities - now is the perfect time for parents to have informed conversations with their kids about the issue of cannabis impaired driving.



Road crashes due to drug and/or alcohol impairment are 100% preventable.

And yet... A drug impaired driving incident is reported every three hours in Canada.¹ Every day, up to four Canadians are killed due to alcohol-related and/or drug-related crashes,² and 45% of those who died in a vehicle crash with drugs in their system tested positive for cannabis.³

That is far too many avoidable fatalities.

Impaired is impaired

Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs or a combination of the two is illegal. The use of any psychoactive drug makes it dangerous to drive a car or any motorized vehicle - just like driving after drinking alcohol. Drug impaired driving endangers not only the driver's life but also the lives of passengers and other road users.

Your teen may be old enough to drive a car or a motorized vehicle like a scooter, a dirt bike, or an ATV. They may even operate farm machinery, boats, or other moving vehicles. If they don't drive yet, they may have friends with a driver's license and get rides as a passenger.

Like alcohol and other drugs, cannabis affects a person's ability to drive, but cannabis use before getting behind the wheel is much more prevalent among young drivers.

While most young people understand the dangers of drinking and driving, their perceptions on cannabis and driving are not as clear cut. When asked, many young people (aged 14 – 19) indicated that they felt that cannabis impaired driving was "safer" or less dangerous than alcohol-impaired driving, and that they were against getting in a car with a drunk driver but might consider taking a ride from a driver who had smoke cannabis depending on who it was and how much they had smoked.⁴

1 Impaired Driving in Canada, Statistics Canada. 2015. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14679-eng.htm>

2 <https://wotr.ca/>

3 <https://wotr.ca/about-us/>

4 Traffic Injury Research Foundation <https://tirf.ca/projects/drug-impaired-driving-learning-centre/>

Young drivers are already at a higher risk of road accidents, as they often lack experience behind the wheel. Whether your teen is a driver or a passenger, it is important they clearly understand the very real dangers of cannabis impaired driving.

Myths & Facts about cannabis impaired driving

There are several misperceptions regarding cannabis and driving that some kids still believe. Explore these common myths together with your young drivers and learn the facts together – it is a great way for you and your kids to have a greater understanding of the issue of cannabis impaired driving.

MYTH: Weed does not affect my driving – it’s not like alcohol.

Half of cannabis users do not think that their driving is affected that much – and 1 in five don’t think it has any negative affect on their driving.⁶

FACT: Cannabis and alcohol may have different effects on the body, but both impair a person’s skills behind the wheel. Cannabis can significantly affect any driver’s abilities, whatever their experience driving. Cannabis impairs balance and coordination, judgement, reaction time, attention, and decision-making skills.⁷ Driving high also increases the likelihood of a crash. Recent research shows a 1.3 to 3.0 fold increase in the risk of a motor vehicle collisions after cannabis use.⁸

MYTH: Driving while high is not nearly as dangerous as driving drunk.

Studies show that driving high nearly doubles the risk of an accident – yet over a third of teens feel that driving after cannabis is not as risky as drunk driving.

FACT: In a recent study by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, cannabis was the drug most often detected among drivers killed in road crashes, surpassing alcohol. In 2016, among those drivers tested for drugs, 23.3% of fatally injured drivers tested positive for cannabis, a steady increase over previous years. Drivers aged 16 to 19 years and 20 to 34 years were most likely to test positive for cannabis.⁹



1 in 4 teens admitted to driving within two hours of using cannabis and 41% of youth feel it is fine to get in a car with someone who is high.⁵

5 <https://woir.ca/about-us/>

6 2017 <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/drugs-health-products/canadian-cannabis-survey-2017-summary.html>

7 Cannabis Health effects, 2018 <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/campaigns/marijuana-cannabis/health-effects.html>

8 Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines: Fischer et al, AJP 2017, Vol 107, No. 8 <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303818>

9 Alcohol, Marijuana & Driving Risk - SoberSmartDriving.tirf.ca

Myths & Facts about cannabis impaired driving

MYTH: High driving doesn't kill anyone – there is nothing in the news about it.

45% of Canadians who have died in a vehicle crash with drugs in their system have tested positive for weed.¹⁰

FACT: Cannabis use has been associated with a significantly increased risk of fatal crash involvement. There is evidence that cannabis is one of the most frequently detected drugs in fatally injured in drivers worldwide.¹¹ There may not be a lot of news coverage, but collisions due to cannabis impairment are common.

MYTH: The police can't tell if I'm driving high.

3,489 – That is the number of drug impaired violations reported in Canada in 2017.¹²

FACT: Police officers can administer roadside tests to check for cannabis impairment – using testing devices or calling in specially trained drug recognition officers.



MYTH: It's no big deal if I get pulled over - they'll will let me off with a slap on the wrist.

It is against the law for young and new drivers to drive after consuming any amount of cannabis, alcohol, or other drugs.

FACT: In most places in Canada, it is zero tolerance for cannabis or alcohol impaired driving. Young drivers should understand that according to the Criminal Code of Canada, the minimum penalty for the first offence of being caught driving while impaired is a hefty fine of \$1000, along with a one year driving prohibition.

MYTH: If I wait an hour or so after smoking weed, I'll be okay to drive.

FACT: According to CAA-funded research, young people who inhale cannabis remain at a greater risk of a vehicle crash even five hours after consumption. The effects of edible cannabis can take longer to appear, and the impairing effects can last longer too. While research varies, edibles may remain in a person's system for up to 12 hours



¹⁰ <https://wotr.ca/>

¹¹ Traffic Injury Research Foundation – Drug Impaired Learning Centre

¹² Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2017 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/180723/dq180723b-eng.pdf>



You can help your kids make the right decision to always drive alcohol and cannabis free.

Parents can make a significant difference in the lives of young drivers by staying informed about the issue and talking with their teens. Family conversations with kids about risky behaviour like driving while high and being a passenger in the car with a high driver are important to have on a regular basis.

As parents, we can give our kids the information, the tools, and the self-confidence to help them deal with any difficult or unexpected moments that can arise, like being at a party with a designated driver who becomes impaired or being offered a joint or a gummy before getting into their car - that way they'll have the skills they need to make the right choices to get home safe.

Encourage your kids to always have a plan for getting home safely and remind them that you'll be there if their plans change or fall through, whatever the reason.

Below are two excellent initiatives are designed for young people to educate them about cannabis impaired driving.

WEED OUT THE RISK - is an interactive, educational program delivered by trained facilitators which helps youth and young adults understand the risks associated with driving high or being a passenger in a vehicle with someone who is driving under the influence of cannabis.

[Click here](#) to learn more about Weed out the Risk's workshops for youth and young adults.

THE HIGH WAY HOME?

"Make your mistakes here, not on the road"

This interactive website takes an experiential learning approach to mobilizing knowledge. Its purpose is to increase the awareness of youth and young drivers with the risks and harms associated with drug-impaired driving. The site guides users through real-life scenarios where they must make decisions about cannabis use and driving.

Additional Resources:

[Traffic Injury Research Foundation](#)

[Canadian Automobile Association](#)

[Don't Drive High](#)

