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University of Southern
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Substance Misuse Prevention Newsletter: A Collection of Readings Impaired Driving



Brief Overview

As we look forward to celebrating the holidays, it is important to plan ahead and use a sober driver when traveling. There is clear evidence that drugs alter perception, mental processes, attention, coordination, and reaction time required for safe driving (Campus Drug Prevention, 2022). Impaired driving as it relates to substance use is particularly prevalent among college-aged students. Studies have shown that in 2016-2020, among full-time college students attending 4-year colleges at ages 19-22, 17.4% reported driving under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or another illicit drug in the past two weeks (Campus Drug Prevention, 2022). Additionally, a survey of students who drove a car in the last 30 days showed that 9.3% did so after drinking alcohol, and 5.7% did so within six hours of using marijuana (Campus Drug Prevention, 2022).

Combined Effects of the Influence of both Cannabis and Alcohol

When mixed together, alcohol and marijuana can have unpleasant effects on an individual. Common physical symptoms include nausea, vomiting, sweating, and dizziness. Psychological symptoms such as anxiety and stress may also occur. The use of both substances has also been associated with drinking a larger amount of alcohol more frequently. It also has been found that the use of both at the same time doubles the odds of drunk driving, social consequences, and harms to self (Addiction Center, 2022).

Impaired Driving Crash Statistics in the U.S. (CCD Law, 2022)

28 People die every day in the U.S. due to crashes that involve alcohol-impaired drivers.

About 800 people are injured every day in drunk driving collisions.

Driving with a BAC of 0.08% or higher is considered alcohol-impaired by law

You can be impaired even if your BAC is below 0.08%.

2 out of 3 people will be involved in an impaired driving collision in their life.

Non-alcoholic drugs like cocaine and marijuana are involved in about 18% of motor vehicle-related deaths.

Marijuana Use and Driving

Marijuana affects areas of the brain that are essential for controlling the complex skills required for driving a vehicle. These areas of the brain are responsible for your body's movements, balance, coordination, memory, and judgment. Skills for driving can be impaired by marijuana use through slowing your reaction time and the ability to make decisions, impairing coordination, and distorting perception (CDC, 2022). Studies have found a direct relationship between blood THC concentration and impaired driving ability (NIH, 2022). Two large studies done in Europe showed that drivers with THC in their blood were about twice as likely to be responsible for a fatal crash than drivers who had not used drugs or alcohol (NIH, 2022).

Edibles

It can take up to two hours for an individual to feel the effects of an edible, whereas an individual who is smoking marijuana can feel the effects more quickly and know when it is time to stop. This delay that can lead people to use more. Because of this, marijuana intoxication is more likely when consuming edibles. Additionally, there is a higher risk of a "bad trip" when taking edibles, and negative experiences can last longer (6-10 hours).

Ways to Stay Safe with Alcohol and Prevent Impaired Driving among College Students (Campus Drug Prevention, 2022)

- Identify misconceptions students may have about impaired driving and provide education on how various drugs affect driving skills.
- Have conversations with students about having a plan to get home from parties safely.
- Stay current on impaired driving trends and prevention strategies in the surrounding the community.
- Wear a seatbelt.
- Encourage students to eat a meal before drinking, drink no more than one standard drink per hour, to never leave a drink unattended, do not mix alcohol with prescription medications, do not drink when tired or ill, and to avoid drinking games and shots.



For comments on this newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact:
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