

Preventing Youth Drugged Driving

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Americans are well aware of the terrible consequences of driving drunk and are familiar with the many successful drinking and driving awareness campaigns.

With the dramatic increase of handheld phones and personal devices, campaigns and laws targeting talking or texting while driving have also gained prominence.

Yet an often overlooked issue, especially among teens and young adults, is drugged driving.

A nationally representative survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), found that in 2007, approximately one in eight weekend, nighttime drivers tested positive for illicit drugs.

According to the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an estimated

10.6 million people aged 12 or older reported driving under the influence of illicit drugs in the past year.

Further, one in three drivers killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2009 who were tested and the test results reported, tested positive for drugs.

Among high school seniors in 2008, one in 10 (10.4 percent) reported that in the two weeks prior to their interview, they had driven a vehicle after smoking marijuana.

Drugged driving is a public health concern because it puts not only the driver at risk, but also passengers and others who share the road. Drugs can impair drivers' ability to operate a motor vehicle just as substantially as alcohol and can prove just as deadly. This is true of drugs such as marijuana and cocaine, as well as psycho-active prescription and over-the-counter medications

Motor vehicle crashes were the leading cause of death for 15- to 19-year-olds in 2007, and the use of drugs or alcohol increase teens' crash risks. According to the 2009 NSDUH report, more than six

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percent of 16 or 17-year olds and nearly 17 percent of 18 to 20 year-olds reported driving under the influence of alcohol in the past year.

In a comprehensive study on unsafe driving by high school students, 30 percent of seniors reported driving after drinking heavily or using drugs, or riding in a car in which the driver had been drinking heavily or using drugs, at least once in the prior two weeks. Find out more at

Parent and Community Activities for Effective Prevention

It is generally accepted that because teens are the least experienced drivers as a group, they have a higher risk of being involved in an accident compared with more experienced drivers.

When this lack of experience is combined with the use of marijuana or other substances – which alter perception, cognition, reaction time, and other faculties – the results can be tragic. Teens whose parents enforce penalties for driving law infractions are more likely than teens whose parents do not enforce penalties to wear their safety belts (89% vs. 74%); require their passengers to buckle up (82% vs. 64%); obey stop signs (91% vs. 60%); and use turn signals (89% vs. 76%).

Parents and other caring adults also play an important role in educating youth about the dangers of drugged driving, so it's important to talk with teens about the risks and for parents to set clear expectations. To download an Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) fact sheet about Teen Drugged Driving, [please click here](#).

[Please click here](#) to read NCADD's Addiction Medicine article titled "**Hope & Caution – for Happy Holidays**".