



Impaired Driving Awareness

During December many people look forward to getting together with friends and family to celebrate the holidays. It's also a time when prevention can play an especially important role. December is unfortunately a deadly month due to impaired driving.

Impaired driving deaths are completely preventable. That's why for more than 40 years, behavioral healthcare agencies like Sinnissippi Centers and others across the country have observed National Impaired Driving Prevention Month in December to raise awareness of the dangers of impaired driving and to promote strategies for all of us to make it home safely: The best gift of the holiday season after all.

Alcohol-impaired driving crashes—which range from being under the influence of substances to distracted driving to speeding—increase throughout December as more people travel. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations (SAMHSA's) 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed over 26 million people ages 16 or older drove under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs during the past year. Approximately 17 percent of these people were 20 to 25 years old. It's important to note that many substances can impair driving, including marijuana, opioids, methamphetamines, including prescribed or over-the-counter medications. Other factors can also impair your driving ability including fatigue and stress, especially in combination with substances. Some facts about impaired driving:

- **Each year around 10,000 people are killed in alcohol-impaired driving crashes**, nearly 33% of all traffic-related deaths in the United States. (NHTSA).
- **Even a small amount of alcohol can affect driving ability.** In 2020, around 2,000 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes where a driver had a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of .01 to .07. The legal threshold for BAC in Illinois is .08.
- Car crashes are a **leading cause of death for teens**, and about **25% of fatal crashes involve an underage impaired driver.** (NHTSA)
- **Drugs** other than alcohol **are the main factor in about 15% of motor vehicle deaths** each year. Often, drugs, mixed with alcohol, are the main factor.
- **Marijuana users were about 25% more likely to be involved in a crash** than drivers with no evidence of marijuana use.

The good news is that prevention works. As we come together this holiday season, be aware of the risks of driving while impaired and take steps to stay safe. There are no shortcuts to “sobering up” and preparing to drive; a person's coordination and reaction time are slowed long before they actually show signs of intoxication or reach legal level of impairment. And coffee is not a cure-all. Even slowing or stopping drinking an hour or more before planning to drive does not mean the alcohol has “worn off.”

So, what can you do? Do what you can to prevent those who are impaired from driving. If you find that a friend is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or is otherwise impaired, don't let them drive. If you are in the situation where you can take their keys and offer them a ride, get them a cab, a ride share service, or some other ride, try to do that. Do anything you can to keep them from driving.

If you find yourself impaired, do the same, give your keys to a friend or loved one, whoever is with you, who is not impaired and can drive you, call a cab, get a ride, or make other arrangements.

The best way to stay safe is to not be impaired in the first place. So, if there is any chance you will be driving, develop and use a plan to get home safe and sound. Rent a hotel room, arrange a ride, whatever makes the most sense in your situation.