**Drink and drug-driving kills**

Drink-driving and drug-driving are both extremely dangerous, and a high proportion of drivers and riders dying on UK roads are over the limit for drink, drugs, or both. In 2022, [22% of deceased drivers](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/developing-drug-driving-statistics/drugs-in-reported-road-fatalities-in-great-britain-data-to-2021-summary#:~:text=Alcohol%20was%20detected%20in%2022,with%20the%20contributory%20factor%20data.), and 34% of all drivers tested were over the legal alcohol limit, which is [80mg per 100ml of blood](https://www.gov.uk/drink-drive-limit) in England and Wales.

In 2022, impairing drugs were detected in 19% of drivers killed, and 30% of those tested.

Impairing drugs can be prescription or over-the-counter medications, as well as illegal drugs.

Drivers have a legal duty to be fit to drive, and you are breaking the law if you drive with any impairing drug in your system, or more than the legal level of alcohol.

Your employer also has a legal duty to make sure that you are not driving for work when impaired – so as well as setting rules about driving, they may also test you for drugs or alcohol. Some companies use systems like alco-locks which test a driver’s breath before enabling the ignition.

**Why is it so dangerous?**

Alcohol overrides inhibitions and impairs concentration and coordination. It also acts as a sedative. Even ‘legal’ quantities of alcohol impair performance.

The most commonly abused drugs are codeine, cocaine and cannabis. Each seriously affects your ability to drive, including poor decision-making, impaired perception and impaired reaction times.

It isn’t possible to tell when alcohol or drugs will have left your body. There are some broad guidelines for alcohol, such as one unit per hour, but the truth is it is very individual – a little like having a broad guideline for how fast you can run a mile – and so that one unit-one hour guideline is really a minimum.

This means that after a few pints or glasses of wine in the evening, you could still be over the limit driving to work the next morning.

Drugs can linger in the body for a long time, and the [minimum threshold](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/drug-driving) for detection is extremely low. You might not think that using drugs on a Friday night has any relevance to driving two or three days later, but they are likely to still be in your body, still detectable, still illegal and possibly still impairing your ability to drive safely.

**The scale of the problem**

In 2022, [police breathalysed 66,000 drivers](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-drinking-and-driving-ras51) who had been involved in collisions (out of a total of 177,000) and found 6% of them were over the legal limit. (RAS2041)



Almost one-quarter of car drivers (23%) between the ages of 16 and 19 who were killed were over the alcohol limit and 26% of those between 20 and 29. However almost half the fatalities (39%) between the ages of 30 and 39 were over the limit. ([RAS2032](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-drinking-and-driving-ras51)).

The police do not test every driver – even those involved in collisions – and so drink-driving is likely to be more common than police statistics suggest. 5% of drivers surveyed say they have driven at least once in the past year when they suspected [they were over the legal limit](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/922537/ras51101.ods) (gov.uk), 2% of them regularly ([RAS51101](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-drinking-and-driving-ras51)).

Drug driving is even harder to quantify, as recreational drug use can be widespread and very hard to spot. A [government survey](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/drugmisuseinenglandandwalesappendixtable) showed that 2.5% of people have taken cocaine and 7.5% cannabis in the year to March 2023.

The government has started to collate road deaths and casualties in which [drug impairment is a contributory factor](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/developing-drug-driving-statistics/developing-drug-driving-statistics-initial-feasibility-study#findings-2014-to-2020). In 2022, of 618 deceased drivers tested for impairing drugs, 185 were positive. This included drugs such as ketamine, LSD, cocaine and fentanyl.

If you do drive over the limit for alcohol or drugs, you are taking a very serious risk with your safety and that of those around you. And if you don’t ever drive impaired, then be prepared to speak up if you see friends or colleagues who do – you might save their life.

**Prescription drugs**

Prescription and over-the-counter drugs can also impair driver performance. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist whether medication is OK for driving. Medicines for some common conditions, like pain, hayfever, anxiety, insomnia or seizures, can make driving unsafe.

Prescription or over-the-counter drugs can also affect your driving if mixed with other drugs or alcohol.

Even if the medication you have taken is legal, driving while impaired is not.



CBD oil is increasingly used in the UK and properly manufactured and analysed products should not contain more than trace amounts of THC, the cannabinoid which provides the ‘high’. However if you buy CBD products on the internet or sourced from other countries, check the full chemical analysis - it may be incompatible with driving rules.

**More than your job’s worth?**

Companies are increasingly instituting zero tolerance policies for drink and drug driving, and may even test employees randomly. Failing a drug or alcohol test – in the workplace or on the roadside - is likely to put your job at risk.

**Legal penalties**

There are severe [legal penalties](https://www.gov.uk/drink-driving-penalties) if you are caught driving under the influence. Drug-driving can win you a minimum 12-month driving ban; a criminal record; an unlimited fine; and up to 6 months in prison. The endorsement remains on your driving licence for 11 years.

Drink driving or attempting to drink-drive (which is classed as being over the limit OR unfit through drink) carries a potential sentence of 6 months’ imprisonment, an unlimited fine and a driving ban for at least 1 year (3 years if convicted twice in 10 years).

It is also illegal to be in charge of a vehicle while over the limit.

These penalties are much more severe if a driver causes injury or death while impaired.