

Drinking and Driving

Get the facts.



Impaired Driving

Impaired driving – driving when your ability is impaired by alcohol or drugs – is a crime.

Drinking and Driving

Drinking and driving is a deadly combination. One drink can reduce your ability to:

- 1) concentrate on the driving task,
- 2) anticipate potentially dangerous situations while you are driving, and
- 3) react to them appropriately.

The more alcohol in your blood, the more trouble you have judging distances and reacting correctly to avoid a hazard. Your vision may also become blurred.

Drugs and Driving

Any drug that changes your mood, or the way you see and feel, will affect the way you drive. The problem is not only associated with illegal drugs. There are prescription drugs and some over-the-counter drugs that can also impair your driving ability.

If convicted of impaired driving, you can lose your licence, be fined, or spend time in jail. Your vehicle does not even have to be moving; you can be charged if you are impaired behind the wheel, even if you have not started to drive.

Consequences

In Ontario, police have power to:

- stop drivers at random to determine whether to test for alcohol
- suspend your driver's licence at roadside for recording 0.05 blood alcohol concentration (BAC) or over on a breath test
- suspend your driver's licence at roadside for recording over a zero BAC (applicable to novice drivers and all young drivers age 21 and under).

What is BAC?

Blood alcohol concentration, or BAC, is the amount of alcohol in a person's body, measured by the amount of alcohol in blood. "0.05" means there are 50 milligrams of alcohol in every 100 millilitres of blood. BAC is used to define intoxication and provides a scientifically valid measure of the level of impairment.

What are the legal BAC Limits?

In Ontario, all novice drivers in the Graduated Licensing System and all young drivers who are age 21 and under, must maintain a zero BAC when driving or face an immediate 24-hour roadside licence suspension, a thirty-day licence suspension upon conviction (novice drivers could face an escalating licence suspension of 90 days or even licence cancellation) and a fine. A BAC of 0.05 and over will result in an immediate roadside suspension for any driver. A BAC of more than 0.08 is a criminal offence and will result in an immediate ninety-day roadside suspension and additional licence suspensions, possible jail time, fines and a criminal record upon conviction.

How much can I drink before I reach BAC limits?

It's impossible to accurately determine how much you can drink before reaching legal BAC limits. So many factors affect BAC: the alcohol concentration of drinks, your weight, age, gender, size, fitness, fatigue, alcohol tolerance, how fast you drink, and when/whether you ate, and the body's ability to digest alcohol.

Getting your BAC back to zero takes time; coffee, food, or physical activity will not make you sober any faster.

The consumption of alcohol can affect your:

- alertness and ability to anticipate and respond to dangerous driving situations
- vision and sensitivity to brightness
- ability to concentrate on the driving task
- reaction time

- coordination and small muscle control (including focussing your eyes on the road ahead)

Trying to calculate your BAC on your own is a risky guessing game. If you drink, don't drive.

Ignition Interlock

In Ontario, a driver who has been:

- convicted of an impaired driving offence, or
- suspended for repeatedly registering a BAC from 0.05 to 0.08 must have an ignition interlock device installed after their licence is reinstated if they want to drive. Drivers who choose not to install an interlock device must wait and not drive until the condition is removed from their licence.

The device is installed for the ignition interlock condition period and must be used by everyone who drives the vehicle, including family and friends.

How does the Ignition Interlock Program work?

An ignition interlock is an in-car alcohol breath-screening device located near the driver's seat, and is connected to the engine's ignition system.

Before starting the vehicle, a driver must blow into the device. If the driver's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is above a pre-set limit (0.02), the vehicle will not start.

Drivers must register with the approved interlock service provider to have the device installed. The device must be inspected regularly by the service provider.

When the ignition interlock condition period is over, drivers convicted of an impaired driving offence must apply to the Ministry of Transportation to have the condition removed from their licence.

The Reduced Suspension with Ignition Interlock Conduct Review Program will allow eligible drivers convicted for a first time of an alcohol-impaired driving offence under the Criminal Code on or after August 3, 2010 to reduce their licence suspension in return for meeting specific requirements, such as the mandatory installation of an approved ignition interlock device in their vehicle. Program participants must abide by the program's conditions and requirements for ignition interlock installation and use.

Arrive Alive

If you plan on drinking, plan not to drive:

- arrange a designated driver
- call a friend or relative
- take a taxi
- stay overnight
- take public transit

For more information

1-800-268-4686 or 416-235-4686.
TTY: 1-866-471-8929 or 905-704-2426
Ontario.ca/drivesober

