



**I**mpaired driving remains a significant road safety, health and economic issue in Canada. Governments are continuing to strengthen policies and programs to address impaired driving with medical assessment and treatment, alcohol ignition interlocks, administrative licence suspensions and vehicle impoundment. The Criminal Code of Canada has been amended to increase the penalties under the Criminal Code, streamline the law and authorize the use of Drug Recognition Experts (DRE) to deal with drug impairment.

However, more work needs to be done, such as Legislative options including the use of random breath tests, mandatory testing after a serious collision and how best to deal with low-level Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) drivers. Possible improvements in alcohol ignition interlock programs include increasing their use and the development of the next generation of devices, which operate passively. In the end, the decision to drink and drive or not is a

personal decision. All drivers need to consider their behaviour and how to best protect themselves, their family and friends and other road users who depend on them to make a safe decision.

Canadians make over 7.4 million trips a year-any one of which could result in a crash. In 2007, roughly 1.84 million Canadians reported that they had driven when they felt they were over the legal limit. In fact, about one-third of all Canadian drivers killed in car crashes had been drinking.

And impaired drivers are not the only ones who suffer. Over 1,000 Canadians-impaired and sober-die each year in alcohol-related crashes. In total, these crashes cost Canadians over \$10.6 billion a year in lost wages, property damage and health-care costs. We must keep reminding ourselves that drinking and driving don't mix. In the future, we may need to find new ways to get hardcore drinkers to change.

## Do you know what over the limit means?



As blood flows through the body, it releases alcohol into the lungs in proportion to its concentration in the blood. Police officers often use a breathalyzer to measure Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC). BAC refers to how much alcohol is in someone's blood.

### A breathalyzer measures the concentration of alcohol in the blood.

As you drink, your BAC goes up. If you are caught driving impaired and/or over the legal limit, you will face many problems.

### WHAT IS "A DRINK"?

Wine, beer and spirits each have different concentrations of alcohol. Most beers contain 5 per cent alcohol, while wines contain 11 to 12 per cent. Spirits—such as vodka or rye—contain 40 per cent or more.

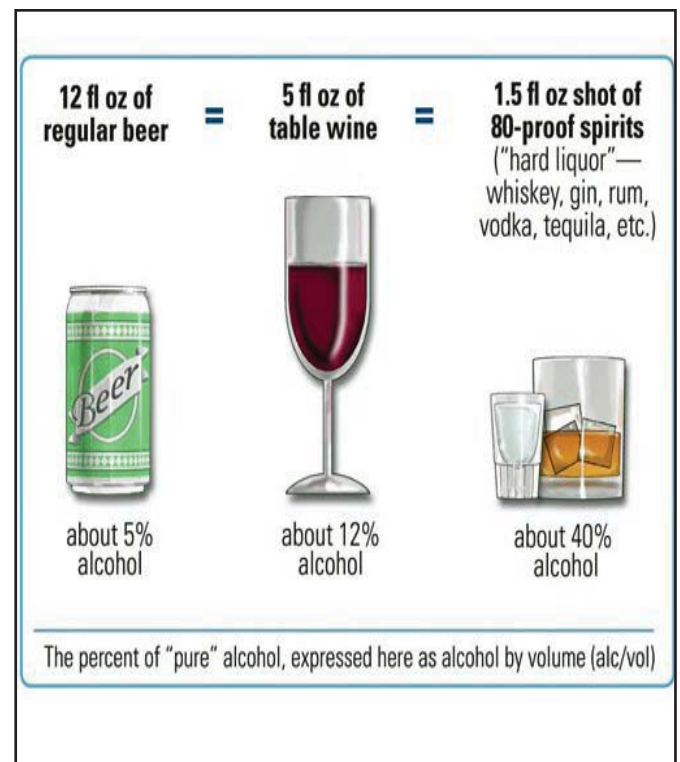
You may drink half a bottle of wine by refilling a large glass twice. If you do, you've had two-and-a-half standard servings.

As a rough guide, a 341mL (12 oz.) bottle of beer,

a 148mL (5 oz.) glass of wine or a 44mL (1.5 oz.) shot of spirits usually contains the same amount of alcohol—about 13.5 grams. These amounts are often called "standard servings." However, it is easy to drink more than you realize. How?

- If you are drinking draft beer rather than bottled beer, you may order a pint—which may be up to 50 per cent bigger than a standard serving.
- You may drink half a bottle of wine by refilling a large glass twice. If you do, you have had two-and-a-half standard servings.
- If you don't use a shot glass when making a mixed drink, you may drink more than you intend.
- Alcohol concentrations vary among brands and types of drinks. For instance, some light beers contain less than 5 per cent alcohol, while others may contain more.

As you can see, defining "a drink" is not simple.

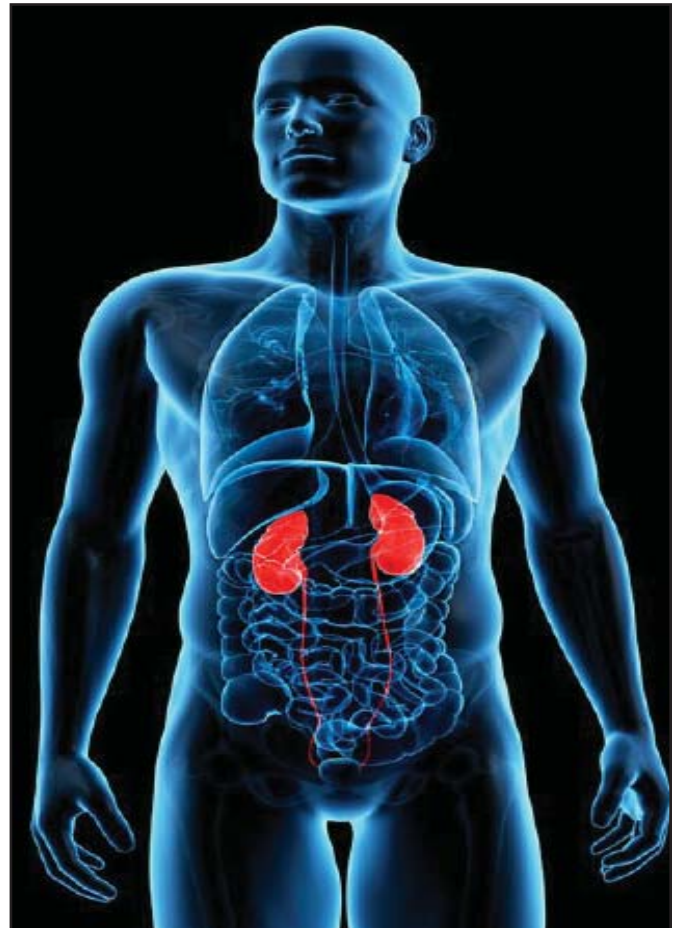


## WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ALCOHOL?

No matter what size drink you have, your bloodstream will spread it throughout your whole body in 30 to 90 minutes. The alcohol then moves to your liver, which breaks over 90 per cent of it down into carbon dioxide and water. The rest passes, unchanged, out of your body. All of this takes about two hours for one standard serving. Any other alcohol you drink during that time will stay in your blood until your liver can deal with it, so your BAC rises quickly to a peak. If you stop drinking, your BAC will slowly start to drop-but it will most likely take much longer to fall than it did to rise.

## YOU ARE SPECIAL

Did you know that your body type affects how much blood you have? It is true. The lighter you are, the less blood you have. So if you weigh 68 kg (150 lb.) and you drink as much alcohol as someone of the same sex who weighs 80 kg (175 lb.), you will have a higher BAC. It is also true that muscle tissue contains more blood while fatty tissue contains more water. So if you have a lot of body fat and you



drink as much alcohol as someone of the same sex who is muscular, your BAC will be higher. Why? Because there is less blood for the alcohol to mix with, the ratio of alcohol to blood is higher. Since women tend to be smaller than men and have more fatty tissue, a woman who drinks as much alcohol as a man usually has a higher BAC-often much higher.

## TIME IS ON YOUR SIDE

You may have heard that you can keep your BAC under the legal limit by drinking no more than one standard drink per hour. This rule only works for a couple of hours and mainly for men. A better plan is to have no more than two standard drinks in an evening. Maybe you have heard that you can sober up faster by dancing, jogging, peeing, taking a shower or drinking water or black coffee. Don't believe it! The only thing that will really lower your BAC is time. If you are over the legal limit, it will take about six hours for your body to get rid of all the alcohol.

## So, what's the bottom line? If you drink, don't drive.

What we eat or drink can affect us in different ways at different times. Sometimes you can drink coffee late at night and sleep like a baby; another night, half a cup at dinner will keep you awake until three in the morning. Perhaps your friends can eat bowls of spicy chili with no ill effects, while even a small taste gives you heartburn. Even if they vary by degree, the effects of drinking almost always include your system slowing down-including the nerves that control your muscles. And, as any bartender can tell you, drinking can make some people angry, sad or worried.

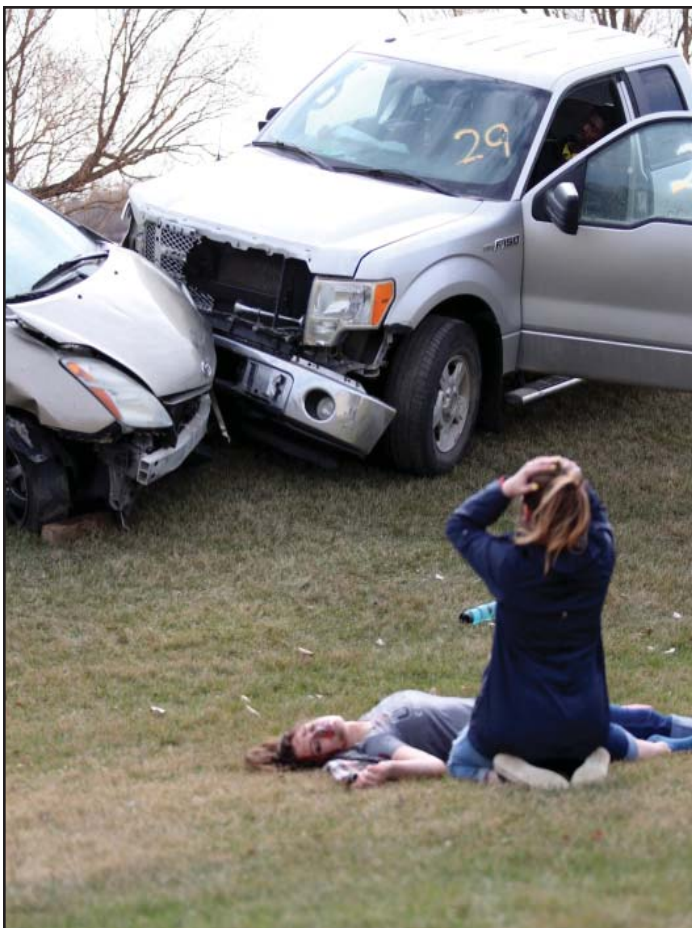
Regular drinkers often learn to hide some of the obvious signs of alcohol use. But while you can sometimes fool your friends and even yourself, you can't trick a breathalyzer.

### **THE EFFECTS CAN BE FATAL**

As the level of alcohol in your blood rises, its effects follow a pattern. The first drink often relaxes you, but less pleasant effects are also happening at the same time. The first thing you might notice is that it will get harder to do things that involve accuracy and making quick decisions. (Have you ever tried to play a video game after a beer?)

If you continue to drink, your movements will be sloppy, your words slurred, your balance off and your reactions slow. You may find it hard to focus your eyes. Rather than feeling cheerful, as you did early in the evening, you may find yourself crying. Take another drink-or more-and you risk falling into a coma.

A pint may hit you harder if you're tired, or if you drink it at lunchtime rather than after dinner.



### **IMPAIRMENT BEHIND THE WHEEL**

Let's say, however, that you've had only a few drinks and you think that you can drive home because it is only a 10-minute drive on back streets. This can be very risky because driving a car requires almost all of your basic skills-everything from judgment to hand-eye coordination-and drinking affects them all. Remember how nervous you were when you were learning to drive? You were nervous for a reason. When you drive, you have to watch the road, be alert for danger, stay in the proper lane, and maintain a constant speed-all at the same time. You might think this is easy, but it is not. Driving requires intense focus and even a small amount of alcohol makes that more difficult.

Seeing and thinking clearly are your most important driving skills. After just one drink, it is harder to judge distances between objects that are standing still; so something as easy as backing your car out of its parking spot can be a problem. And even with very little alcohol in your system, you will find it harder to judge the distances between moving objects.

Sober drivers scan the road often, looking for pedestrians, traffic and signs. When impaired, you do this less often. After drinking, you will also look at one thing for longer than usual. As a result, your scanning takes more time, so you may miss something important. Alcohol makes it harder to see things a little outside your direct line of sight. You'll also pay less attention to what you do see-even if it is a child running into traffic.

Alcohol affects other important driving skills, as well. For instance, tests show that impaired drivers steer more slowly and are heavier on the brake. They also are slow to change speed and correct steering. Since drinking changes our ability to make judgments, it can also make us more willing to take risks. The same pretend-confidence that a drink can give you to talk freely over the punch bowl can lead to bad decisions on the road. When you have been drinking, you may not respect your normal margins of error. For example, you may be certain you can make the light before it changes-a decision you may not make when sober. The more you drink, the greater your risk of causing a crash.



If you are 35 and driving with an alcohol limit of between .08 and .099, you are four times more likely to die in a crash than you would be if you were sober. If you are 19 and driving with the same level of alcohol in your system, you are 20 times more likely to be killed.

Figures like these have led some provinces to set low or zero alcohol levels for young and new drivers. If they are caught on the road with any amount of alcohol in their systems, they may be fined and lose their license.

No matter how much driving experience you have, drinking changes everything. It puts everyone-you, your passengers and others on the road-at risk. So before you have that first drink and your judgment becomes impaired, make the smart choice: leave your car keys at home.

But if you are found to be driving any type of motor vehicle while legally impaired, you are committing a crime. And you don't have to be driving a car or truck on the road to be charged. Impaired driving laws apply to boats, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles and airplanes. They apply on private property as well as on public roads. They apply even if the vehicle is parked. Once you sit behind the wheel with the keys in your hand, the laws apply to you.



## SO YOU DID IT... AND GOT CAUGHT WHAT HAPPENS NOW

It is against the law to refuse to provide a breath or blood sample. So if you are like most people pulled over, you will blow into the breathalyzer. If the warning light goes on, the amount of alcohol in your blood is over the legal limit. Right away, the officer may suspend your licence and your car will be towed away. You will be arrested, put into a police car and taken to the nearest police station.

If the sample is confirmed, the police will charge you under the Criminal Code of Canada, take your picture and fingerprint you. After the courts decide you've been driving while impaired, the penalties are serious. Think about it. Drinking and driving can give you a criminal record, maybe a huge debt and, if you drive for a living, cost you your job. When you do get your licence back, your insurance premiums will be very high.

Things could be worse! Let's say that instead of simply being caught in a roadside check, you got in a crash that hurt or killed someone. The crash will haunt you for the rest of your life, and the law will also punish you. You may need to pay the victims back in some way. You can also be charged with impaired driving causing bodily harm or impaired driving causing death. The federal Criminal Code imposes other penalties, including jail time. If someone gets hurt because of your impaired driving, you could go to jail for up to 10 years. If someone dies, you could spend up to the rest of your life in prison.



## Drugs & Driving Don't Mix

Most of us know that drinking and driving is a bad mix, but what about drugs and driving?

Taking drugs before driving - whether they are legal or not - is dangerous. Drugs and driving are a big problem in Canada: Studies show drugs are found in up to 30 percent of drivers killed in crashes. Drugs can make it harder to react, judge distances and make decisions. You may find it harder to steer, stay in your lane or drive at a steady speed. You become much more impaired when you use two or more drugs before driving. And the combined effects of even a little alcohol and drugs can be much greater than the effect of either one alone. The dangers of drug impaired driving are like those of alcohol impaired driving. The penalties for a conviction are the same as well.

**Since teens haven't been driving for long, they have fewer skills to draw on if they get into trouble on the road.**

Over the past ten years, when people spoke out against drinking and driving, teens listened. The rate of alcohol-related crashes among teens dropped faster than the rate among any other age group. But while many young people know they need designated drivers, they still face unique risks:

- Teens haven't been driving for long, so they have fewer skills to draw on if they get into trouble on the road.
- Young people often share rides, so car crashes involving young drivers often hurt or kill many people at once
- Most young people can't legally drink, so they often drink far from town - in parks or at cottages, for instance. So the common tip to "walk or take the bus home" doesn't really apply



Here are a few ways teens and their parents can reduce the risks related to impaired driving.

### **TIPS FOR TEENS**

- Speak up. Talk to your friends about the risks of drinking and driving.
- Think ahead. How would you get around if you couldn't drive? Graduated licensing means you can lose your license after just one drink. And how would you feel if you caused a crash - especially if someone were hurt or killed?
- Offer support. Make sure your designated driver doesn't drink at all.
- Be strong. Never get in the car with someone who has been drinking! Instead, call your parents or someone else and ask for a ride. They would rather drive you home in the middle of the night than learn you were hurt or killed in a crash.
- Be prepared. Bring enough money to pay for a cab if you need one.
- Celebrate wisely. Promote the "Safe Grad" concept. On graduation night, think about things you could do besides drinking. If you and your friends do drink, make plans before the party to ensure everyone will get home safely.

### **TIPS FOR PARENTS**

- Be open. Talk to your teens about drinking/ doing drugs and driving. Let them know you won't let them use the car anymore if they drink and drive.
- Provide a safety net. Tell your teens they can call you anytime they need a safe ride home and you'll be there no questions asked.
- Share the facts. Make sure your teens know that riding in a car with a driver who has been drinking is just as dangerous as driving after drinking.
- Set a good example. If you've been drinking, don't drive.

## WOMEN

### A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

Most information on drinking and driving has been aimed at men. That made sense back when most drivers were men. But times have changed; women drive about one-third of all car trips in Canada. Women shouldn't make driving decisions based on advice for men. If a woman and a man drink the same amount of alcohol, the woman's Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) will usually be higher, since most women are smaller than most men and have less blood.

## HARD-CORE DRINKERS

### TOUGH MINDS TO CHANGE

Since the 1980s, there is much less drinking and driving in Canada. But some hard-core drinkers still drive after drinking a lot of alcohol—often twice the legal limit. Some do so over and over again, and very little seems to change their minds.

These people may be heavy drinkers or full-blown alcoholics. They may not want to admit they have a problem with drinking and driving, because then they would have to admit they have a problem with alcohol. If you know people like this:

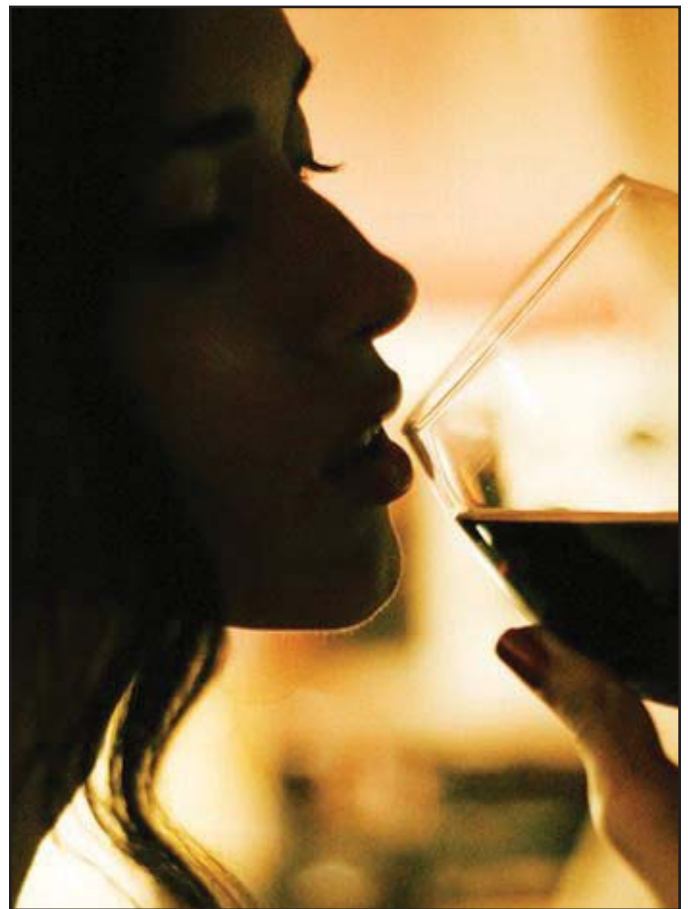
- Try to discuss the problem with them when they're sober.
- Cheer them on if they decide to get help.
- Invite them to social events where no one is drinking, so they know they don't need to drink to have fun.
- Be patient. Getting sober is hard, and just about everyone falls off the wagon at least once.

## OLDER DRIVERS

### CHANGING NEEDS

While over two-thirds of Canadians 65 and over have a driver's licence and access to a car, many older drivers don't drive after dark and drive more slowly during the day because of their changing vision and slower response times.

Even so, older drivers are more likely than others to be involved in crashes at intersections. Sometimes it is because they don't see road signs or yield the right of way. They may also have problems making left turns because of having to make too many choices at once.



## OFF-ROAD DRIVERS

### DRIVE SAFELY... EVEN OFF THE ROAD

Alcohol makes it hard to drive any vehicle safely, including a boat, snowmobile or allterrain vehicle (ATV). As a result, the laws for road vehicles apply to their off-road cousins too. You can be charged with impaired driving whether you're driving your car across town or your boat across the lake. Off-road drivers have challenges such as driving in areas with no traffic signals or road signs. Problems we don't usually see on the road, from fences to water buoys, can surprise us. And since most of us spend less time on a snowmobile or in an ATV than we do in our cars, we are less skilled at judging danger and making the right choices. Add alcohol and you have a recipe for disaster.

### **Add alcohol, and you have a recipe for disaster.**

Alcohol won't warm you up if it is cold or rainy. In fact, it lowers your body temperature, so you're more likely to suffer from exposure to the cold. To be safe, leave the alcohol at home.



## The truly thoughtful host

As a good host, you don't want a guest to be in a crash after the party. And if you've been serving alcohol, the law may even find you liable for any damage your guests cause on the way home.

You need to make sure your guests don't drive if they've had too much to drink. Here are a few tips.

- Take "no" for an answer. If you offer guests a drink and they say "no thanks", don't try to change their minds.
- Give your guests a choice. Serve a festive fruit punch or "mocktail" clearly labeled alcohol-free, along with other non-alcoholic juices, sodas and water.
- Don't have an open bar. When all the bottles are out on the table, guests tend to drink more than usual.
- Stay sober. You may need to stop serving drinks to some guests and try to stop them from driving home if you think they have had too much to drink. Being a good host requires judgment and tact-and you won't have either if you are impaired.
- End the party slowly. Stop serving drinks a few hours before the party ends. Instead, serve food and non-alcoholic drinks, and urge your guests to stay to enjoy them.
- Keep cash on hand for cab fares.
- Invite guests to stay overnight.
- Ask guests to plan ahead. When you invite guests, ask them to make plans for getting home safely.

## BE A GOOD PASSENGER

Help everyone in your car get home safely by doing the following.

- Make sure everyone in the car knows who the designated driver is before you get to the party.
- Support the designated driver. If your driver has been drinking, suggest he or she have some food. If you've had only a drink or two, offer to be the designated driver instead, and switch to non-alcoholic drinks.
- Don't let anyone get in the car with an impaired driver. Your safety is more important than someone's feelings.
- Be honest. If someone asks you to drive because he or she doesn't feel able, don't say yes if you've been drinking. Instead, suggest another way you can all get home.

