



# CANNABIS & DRIVING

Driving impaired by cannabis or other substances can lead to serious life-changing consequences. Evidence shows that younger, less experienced drivers are most at risk. Cannabis impaired drivers are **five times** more likely to be involved in a fatal collision, while drivers that use cannabis and alcohol together are **forty times** as likely to be involved in a fatal collision.

## Why risk it?

The 2020 Canadian Cannabis Survey found that, when drivers age 20-24 were asked why they reported driving after consuming cannabis...

- 72.9% did not feel impaired
- 35.5% claimed they did not have to drive very far
- 33.8% thought they could drive carefully
- 23% did not have alternate transportation
- 14.2% said they would not be caught by law enforcement



## How Does Cannabis Affect Driving?

Driving is a complex task that requires good cognitive functions, motor skills, judgement, and reflexes. THC (the main psychoactive compound in cannabis) binds to specific receptors in the brain (called CB1), which hinders the release of neurotransmitters responsible for these functions.

### Locations & functions of CB1 receptors in the brain<sup>2</sup>

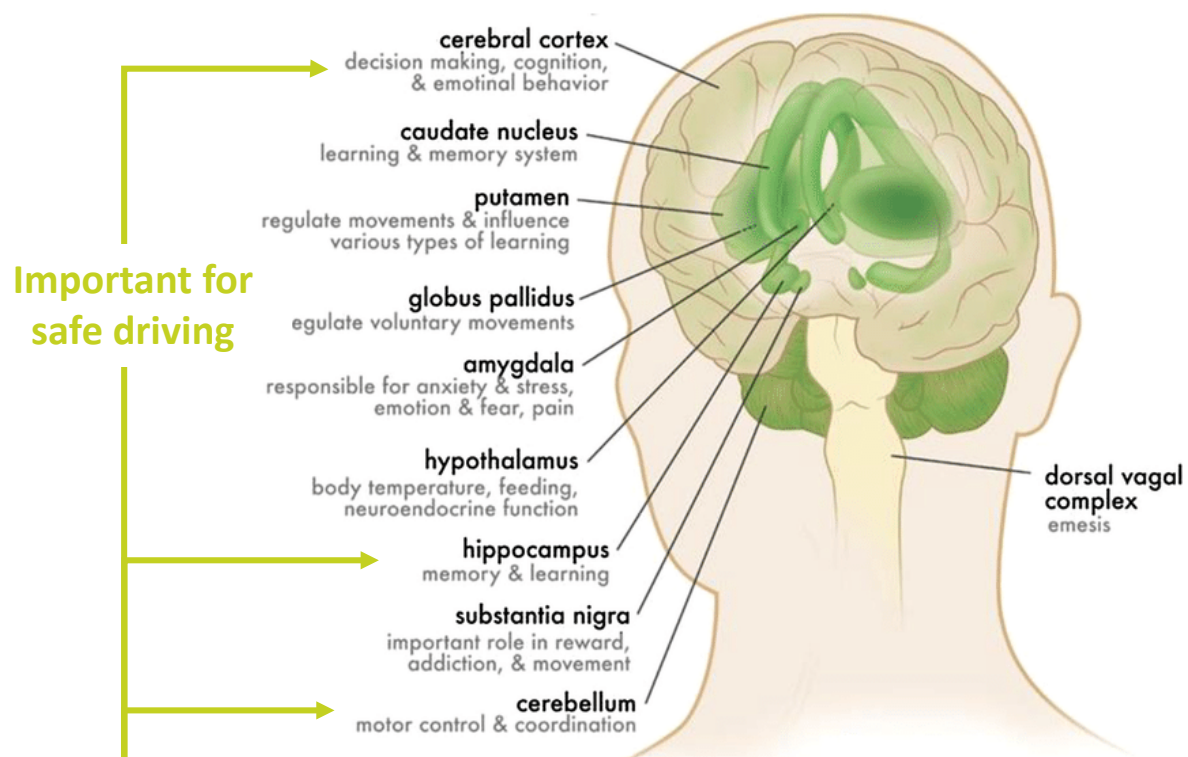


Image source: [www.ccic.net](http://www.ccic.net)

When THC binds to a CB1 receptor, it generates activity. This activity can hinder the receptor's normal role of releasing important neurotransmitters that regulate many brain functions.<sup>3</sup>

- In a 2017 roadside survey, **16.1%** of **16 to 24 year olds** tested positive for cannabis (vs. 7.8% average across all age groups).<sup>4</sup>
- **Youth under 25** are **3-4x** more likely than adults to get into a vehicle with a cannabis-impaired driver.<sup>5</sup>
- **Youth ages 16 to 19** are **4x** more likely to get into a vehicle with a cannabis-impaired driver if they are also a cannabis user.<sup>6</sup>



## What does being impaired look like?

Impairment from cannabis may cause changes in behavior (delayed reactions to changes on the road, struggling to focus on a lane, distorted sense of reality) as well as physical symptoms (unfocused gaze, dizziness/poor coordination, fatigue, anxiety).

Police officers have methods and tools to test for impaired driving, and the penalties can be severe.<sup>6</sup>

If a driver is stopped by police and suspected of being impaired, they might be asked to:



1. Complete a standardized field sobriety test (SFST) or provide an oral fluid sample (police now have devices that can test saliva for THC on the spot).
  - This test **cannot be used to lay charges**; however, it can **give police the grounds to ask for the second test**.
2. If the driver fails the roadside test, police can require they go to the station for a drug recognition evaluation (DRE) or to provide a blood or urine sample.
  - This test **can be used to lay an impaired driving charge**.

Penalties begin when a concentration of **2 nanograms (ng) of THC per millimeter (ml) of blood** is detected. The amount of cannabis needed to reach that concentration will vary based on the **person, form of ingestion (inhaling vs. eating or drinking), and potency of the product**.

Source: [DoJ, Gov't of Canada](http://DoJ.Gov't of Canada)

2ng-5ng THC/ml blood		Max. \$1,000 fine
5ng or more of THC/ml blood	1 <sup>st</sup> offence	Min. \$1,000 fine
	2 <sup>nd</sup> offence	Min. 30 days prison
	3 <sup>rd</sup> offence	Min. 120 days prison
2.5ng or more THC/ml blood + 50mg alcohol/ml blood	1 <sup>st</sup> offence	Min. \$1,000 fine
	2 <sup>nd</sup> offence	Min. 30 days prison
	3 <sup>rd</sup> offence	Min. 120 days prison

## Risks of Impaired Driving and Safer Alternatives

In addition to having a vehicle seized or completing safe driving programs, cannabis impaired drivers will receive a criminal record. This can affect a person's ability to get a job or travel outside of Canada.

Most importantly, driving while impaired can endanger the health and safety of everyone on the road, including passengers, other drivers and pedestrians. Experts are still trying to figure out how much cannabis is safe to consume before driving, and exactly how long you should wait after getting high before you drive.



Take transit



Designate a driver



Call a taxi



Call a friend or relative



Sleep over

### Reference List

<sup>1</sup> Fischer et al. (2017) [Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines: Update of Evidence and Recommendations](#)  
<sup>2</sup> Baler & Delrahim-Howlett (2017) Building smart cannabis policy from the science up  
<sup>3</sup> Brubacher et al. (2020) [Cannabis-impaired driving and Canadian youth](#)  
<sup>4</sup> Beirness & Porath (2019) [CCSA: Clearing the Smoke on Cannabis Cannabis Use and Driving](#)  
<sup>5</sup> Michelle Rotermann (2020) [What has changed since cannabis was legalized?](#)  
<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada (2020). [Canadian Cannabis Survey: Summary](#)  
<sup>7</sup> Department of Justice, Government of Canada. [Impaired Driving Laws](#)