

For some people, the holiday season is “the most wonderful time of the year.” For others, the holidays can add stress, anxiety, depression, and mental health issues, possibly triggering substance abuse, relapse and overdose. This year with the pandemic circumstances, including isolation, health risks, cancelled plans and financial hardships, these triggers and feelings are elevated.

December is National Impaired Driving Prevention Month. Impaired driving includes driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, including over-the-counter (OTC) medications, prescription drugs, marijuana, or other illegal drugs. Even small amounts of these drugs affect the brain and can alter perception, mental processes, attention, balance, coordination, reaction time and other abilities required for safe driving. A national survey showed 22.5% of nighttime weekend drivers tested positive for illegal, prescription, or OTC drugs.

Alcohol and Driving

Driving skills begin to be impaired after the first drink. With a Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) of 0.04%, half the legal limit in Indiana, the chances of being involved in a crash elevate due to a slowing of reaction time. By the time BAC reaches 0.06%, still under Indiana’s legal limit, drivers are much more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than a non-drinking driver.

Two of the most celebrated dates in December – Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve – are also among the most dangerous. While drunk driving deaths typically represent around a third of all traffic fatalities, that increases to nearly 50% on Dec. 24 and Dec. 31.

Common Signs of Impaired Drivers on the Road

Stay alert to stay safe. Here are some common signs that may indicate a driver is impaired:

- Drivers who quickly accelerate and decelerate their vehicle for no obvious reason;
- Drivers who swerve and weave in and out of traffic or across lanes of traffic and/or into the shoulder of the roadways;
- Drivers who brake erratically and for no obvious reason;
- Drivers who aggressively tailgate;
- Drivers who do not stay in one lane while traveling down the roadway;
- Drivers whose vehicles nearly-miss collisions with other vehicles or objects;
- Drivers who are traveling over ten mph lower than the speed limit;
- Drivers who are traveling on the wrong side of the road; and
- Drivers who make illegal or abrupt turns.

Teen Driving

Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among people aged 16 to 19. When teens’ inexperience at driving is combined with the use of drugs, the results can be tragic. 22% of teens admitted that driving while high on marijuana is common among their friends. In 2019, 4.4 million young people between ages 16 and 25 admitted to driving under the influence of marijuana within the past year. Parents, educate your teens on the dangers of impaired driving and not to get in a car with a driver who has used marijuana or other drugs.

A person's choice to drive impaired can cause permanent consequences. Help keep our roadways safe this holiday season. Plan ahead, establish safe transportation, and avoid impaired driving.

For more information, please visit our website at www.drugfreedamscounty.org.