

Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol or Other Drugs

Every injury and death caused by drunk driving is totally preventable. Unfortunately, drunk drivers cause over twenty percent of all traffic fatalities in the United States each year. Driving under the influence of alcohol is grossly under estimated and is an activity that Americans do so routinely; few contemplate the consequences of getting in a car drunk.

It's easy to forget that dry statistics represent real people and real lives, but drunk driving affects more than just the people driving drunk. Tragically, it is often innocent pedestrians or sober drivers who die from the action of drivers under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Non-occupants: Pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-occupants, make up about 17% of the people killed in alcohol-related crashes each year.

Passengers: About 20% of the Americans killed in crashes involving alcohol were the unfortunate passengers of drunk drivers. You should never get in a car with somebody who has been drinking.

Non-intoxicated Drivers: These innocent drivers were unable to evade the erratic, unpredictable driving of drunk drivers. Many times drunk drivers are found driving on the wrong side of the road, which often leads to the deadly head-on collision.

Intoxicated Drivers: Just over half of the Americans killed in alcohol related crashes were the intoxicated drivers themselves. Vision blurry, judgment seriously compromised, and attention dangerously low, these drivers are not competent to drive.

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*This program is partially funded by Region V Systems,
the United Way of Lincoln/Lancaster County,
JBC and private donations.*

*For more information regarding
alcohol, tobacco or drug issues please contact:*

**Lincoln
Council on
Alcoholism and
Drugs, Inc.**

914 L Street
Lincoln, NE 68508
(402) 475-2694
Fax: (402) 475-2699
prevention@lcad.org
www.lcad.org



Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)

What does “Blood Alcohol Concentration” mean?

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream. It is measured in percentages. For instance, having a BAC of .08% means that a person has one drop of alcohol per 800 drops of blood in the body.

Can you be intoxicated if you don't feel drunk?

Absolutely. With each sip of an alcoholic beverage, your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) increases. BAC refers to your body's ability to process alcohol in your bloodstream, regardless of whether or not you feel the effects of alcohol.

Don't people eventually learn how to “handle” their alcohol?

No two people will react to the same drink in exactly the same way. There are many factors that determine how alcohol will make you feel. These different factors can change from person to person and even from day to day. For example:

Alcohol Content: It's not how many drinks you have, but how much alcohol each drink contains that determines BAC.

Fatigue: If you are tired, the effect of alcohol will be stronger than if you are well rested.

Emotional State of Mind: Your mood can make a difference in how you react to alcohol, but it will not alter your BAC level.

Food: The less food you have in your stomach the more you will be affected by the alcohol you have consumed.

Body Weight and Type: Generally, the less you weigh, the more you will be affected by alcohol. Still, even among people of the same weight, a well-muscled individual will be less affected than someone with a higher percentage of body fat.

Gender: Females tend to have a greater amount of body fat and less of the enzyme alcohol dehydrogenase (which breaks down alcohol) than males. For this reason, they tend to absorb alcohol more quickly than males do.

Drinking Time: The more time you take to consume one drink and the more time you allow to pass between drinks, then the less effect the drinks will have because your body will have gained extra time to metabolize the alcohol.

Medication: Medication (even over-the-counter remedies) may increase the effect of alcohol. It is important to follow your doctor's advice. Many medications carry a warning against drinking alcohol.

Impaired Driving in Nebraska

For one of every 160 miles driven in Nebraska in 1998, a legally intoxicated person (BAC .10) sat behind the wheel. An estimated 6,400 crashes in Nebraska involved alcohol. These crashes killed 119 and injured an estimated 4,300 people.

BAC LEVEL

0.01% - 0.02%

CHANGE IN DRINKER'S BEHAVIOR

The drinker feels relaxed, with minor impairment of judgment and memory. Usually no apparent changes in behavior are noted.

0.03% - 0.04%

There is some loss of judgment and efficiency. Alertness is decreased. Small behavioral changes begin to be noticed.

0.05% - 0.06%

Inhibitions are lowered. Decision-making skills are affected. The drinker begins to have less control over actions and emotions.

0.07% - 0.08%

Walking, talking and balance are visibly affected. The drinker's ability to react is notably slower.

0.09% - 0.10%

Vision, judgment, speech and reaction times are all severely affected. Loss of balance is common.

0.11% - 0.15%

Judgment, memory, and self-control are further affected. Irresponsible behavior and exaggerated mood swings are evident. There is a decrease in the drinker's ability to sense pain.

0.16% - 0.19%

The drinker's behavior and speech are greatly affected. There is mental confusion, severe mood swings, and lack of motor control. The drinker is unable to perform ordinary tasks.

0.20% - 0.30%

The drinker is in a confused or dazed state. Unconsciousness may occur. All physical and mental abilities are severely impaired. The central nervous system is acutely depressed.

Above 0.30%

The drinker is unconscious, with an irregular heartbeat and breathing pattern. Coma or death is possible as a result of acute alcohol poisoning.

In 1998, Nebraska drivers with:

- BAC's of .10 and above were involved in an estimated 6,100 crashes that killed 88 and injured 3,700.
- BAC's between .08-.09 were involved in an estimated 100 crashes that killed 9 and injured 200.
- Positive BAC's below .08 were involved in an estimated 200 crashes that killed 22 and injured 400.

Auto Insurance Rates

Alcohol-related crashes accounted for an estimated 12% of Nebraska's auto insurance payments. Reducing alcohol-related crashes by 10% would save 10 million in claims payments and loss adjustment expenses.

Costs Per Drink

The societal costs of alcohol-related crashes in Nebraska averaged \$0.70 per drink consumed. People other than the drinking driver paid \$0.40 per drink.

Prevention Savings

Nebraska already has many important impaired driving laws. However, a number of additional strategies can be used to mitigate the harm from impaired driving.

- Enforcing Serving Intoxicated Patrons Law
- Graduated Licensing
- Sobriety Checkpoint Program
- Primary Belt Law

Current Nebraska Penalties for Driving While Intoxicated

First Offense:

Maximum: 60 days in jail; 6 months license revocation & \$500 fine
Minimum: 7 days in jail; 6 months license revocation & \$400 fine
If given probation 60 days license revocation and a \$400 fine

Second Offense:

Maximum: 90 days in jail; 1-year license revocation & \$500 fine
Minimum: 30 day in jail; 1-year license revocation & \$500 fine
If given probation 10 days in jail or not less than 240 hours of

community service with 1 year license revocation & \$500 fine.

Third Offense:

Maximum: 1 year in jail; 15 years license revocation & \$600 fine
Minimum: 90 days in jail; 15-year license revocation & \$600 fine
If given probation 30 days in jail, 2 - 15 year license revocation & \$600 fine

A person convicted of DUI will also have to pay for an alcohol assessment during a presentence evaluation and if ordered by the judge to attend an alcohol treatment program. The treatment program can cost over \$3,000 and will be at the expense of the person convicted of the DUI.

In addition to the above penalties, all vehicles owned by a person convicted of a second or subsequent DUI violation will be immobilized at the owner's expense for a period of not less than five days and not more than eight months. Immobilization means revocation or suspension of the registration of motor vehicle(s), including the license plates. As an alternative to the immobilization provisions, the courts shall require the installation of an ignition interlock on each of the owner's motor vehicles.

Making Progress

While more needs to be done to reduce impaired driving, much has already been accomplished in the United States over the years.

- Alcohol-related fatal traffic crashes have declined steadily since 1987 and recently stood at an 18-year low of 33.6 percent.
- Deaths associated with young drinking drivers aged 16 to 24, decreased 47% in a recent 15-year period.
- Alcohol-related traffic fatalities per miles driven dropped 55 percent between 1983 and 1996.