Even with a lot of interesting and important debate around drugs these days — marijuana legalization, the opioid crisis, medical uses and abuses — there’s one area that remains a clear and present danger: Driving while impaired by drugs is unsafe, and can even be deadly, for everyone on the road.

**MYTH-BUSTING DATA**

Ever heard someone try to explain away drugs as having less of an effect on driving than alcohol?

- I'm high functioning.
- I don't feel any different.
- But I didn't even drink anything!
- It's just my medicine.
- I'm more focused when I'm high.

But traffic data in New York State refutes those excuses with serious facts. Drug-related crashes resulting in injury or fatality are higher than ever and are affecting real people every single day.¹

![25% of all fatal crashes in 2016 were drug-related. Up from 17% in 2012-2013.](image)

In 2016, drug-impaired driving led to:

- **1,041** total crashes with an injury or fatality
- **267** fatalities
- **1,303** people injured

An impaired driver puts more than just themselves at risk. In 2016, the 267 drug-impaired driving fatalities included others on the road as well:

- Drivers: **55%**
- Pedestrians: **16%**
- Passengers: **25%**
- Bicyclists: **4%**

**HIGH ON DRUGS, SHORT ON DRIVING SKILLS**

Drugs, whether illicit or prescription, have a wide range of effects on your brain and body. Unfortunately, along with the munchies, pain-relief, or euphoria, other side-effects include obstructing the most basic skills you need to safely operate a vehicle.

**MARIJUANA**²
- Distorts sense of time and distance
- Delays judgment and response
- Reduces concentration

**COCAINE**
- (and other stimulants like methamphetamine, Molly, even Adderall)³
- Incites speed and aggression
- Provokes high-risk choices
- Leads to restlessness, anxiety, irritability

**PRESCRIPTION DEPRESSANTS**
- (like Valium, Xanax, Ambien)⁴
- Causes drowsiness
- Slows brain activity
- Leads to sluggish and uncoordinated motor skills
GETTING CAUGHT

If you need a reason other than safety to avoid drug-impaired driving, consider this: highly trained Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) police officers are increasing their numbers and skills in a serious effort to keep drug-impaired drivers off the road.

IN 2016:\(^5\)

- 8,277 DREs nationwide performed 31,421 enforcement checks
- 217 DREs in New York State performed 1,874 enforcement checks

Since drug-impairment is harder to detect than using a breathalyzer, suspected impairment often leads to an arrest. DREs then perform a meticulous 12-step evaluation that includes interviews, pulse and eye examinations, and eventually a blood and/or urine test.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Whether you’re a driver, a passenger, a party host, friend or family, be an active voice on the dangers of drug-impaired driving. Here are the populations with the highest risks for fatal and personal injury crashes in New York State:\(^6\)

- Be a buddy. Pay special attention if you—or someone you know—are at high risk, and speak up about the life and death risks of drug-impaired driving:
  - Men in their 20s or 30s
  - People in their 40s and 50s on prescription meds
- Check prescription labels and consult your doctor
- Designate a sober driver
- Use a taxi, ride-share, or public transit
- Stay put and off the road when using drugs or taking meds

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2. “How Safe is Recreational Marijuana?” 2013, Scientific American
3. “Cocaine use and driving impairment,” 2013, Addiction.com