

# Fit to drive

## DRUG DRIVING

### Q1: In the past 12 months, have you driven after taking illegal drugs?

Three in every 100 drivers (3%) admit to having driven while under the influence of illegal drugs – a significant minority ignoring the unpredictable and dangerous effects on driving. This proportion is unchanged since a similar Brake and Direct Line survey in 2003. However, it is likely that the true extent of the problem is greater than revealed here, as research suggests drug driving is more prevalent in hard to reach social groups that may be underrepresented in this survey.

- 97% said no
- 2% said yes – cannabis
- 1% said yes – cocaine
- 0.5% said yes – ecstasy
- 0.5% said yes – ketamine
- 0.5% said yes – LSD or mushrooms
- 0.5% said yes – amphetamines
- 0.5% said yes – heroin
- 0.5% said yes – other

### THE FACTS: ILLEGAL DRUGS AND DRIVING

Illegal drugs have a variety of very serious negative effects on driving ability, and the effects can be unpredictable, especially given their illegal and therefore unregulated and variable nature. Drugs affect different people in different ways and the effects can last for days, sometimes without that person being aware of it. The likely effects of some common illegal drugs on driving include:

- Cannabis slows your reaction times, affects your coordination and concentration and makes you drowsy.<sup>1</sup>
- ‘Stimulant’ drugs such as ecstasy, speed and cocaine distort your perceptions and make you jumpy. They can also make you over-confident or paranoid and confused.<sup>2</sup>
- Heroin and other opiates make you feel relaxed and sleepy, slowing reaction times and impairing coordination.<sup>3</sup>

Levels of drug driving are not yet well-recorded, but research suggests that the scale of the problem may be similar to drink-driving. A study by the Transport Research Laboratory has found that 18% of drivers and 16% of motorcyclists killed in road crashes had traces of illegal drugs in their system, the most common being cannabis.<sup>4</sup> It’s been estimated that 200 deaths a year may result from drug driving.<sup>5</sup>

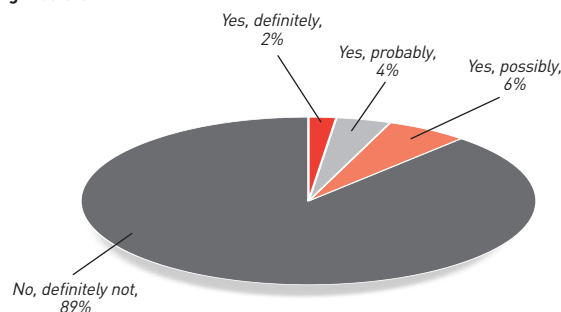
As of 2 March 2015, it will be an offence to drive with drugs in your body in England, Scotland and Wales, removing the need to prove impairment. The offence carries a maximum six month jail sentence, maximum £5,000 fine, and an automatic 12 month driving ban. Roadside drug testing devices will be used by police to catch drug drivers.

### Q2: In the past 12 months, have you been a passenger in a vehicle when the driver may have taken illegal drugs or still been affected from taking illegal drugs the night before?

One in nine (11%) believe they may have been a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who was under the influence of illegal drugs – a much greater proportion than would admit to this behaviour themselves. This is more common among males (15%) and 18-24 year olds (18%).

- 2% said yes, definitely
- 4% said yes, probably
- 6% said yes, possibly
- 89% said no, definitely not

Figure 1: In the past 12 months, have you been a passenger in a vehicle when the driver may have taken illegal drugs or still been affected from taking illegal drugs the night before?



### ADVICE FOR DRIVERS: DRUGS AND DRIVING NEVER MIX

- Never risk taking illegal drugs and driving. Their effects are unpredictable, but research shows they can have a disastrous impact on your ability to drive safely. Drugs and alcohol is an especially deadly combination.
- It is impossible to judge how impaired you are or if a friend is impaired, so if you or a mate has been taking drugs, you should assume you're unfit to drive, even if you feel okay.
- You don't have to be confrontational to speak out to someone who's thinking about drug driving. You can talk to them in a friendly way, explaining why it's a seriously bad idea to get behind the wheel. You could offer to call them a taxi, walk them to the bus stop or walk them home. If they are insistent on driving you might have to be more firm, take their keys or even call the police.
- The effects of drugs can last a long time. They can also badly disrupt sleep and make you a risk behind the wheel for days as a result. That's why you can't have illegal drugs and driving in your life at the same time without posing a danger to yourself and others.

# Fit to drive

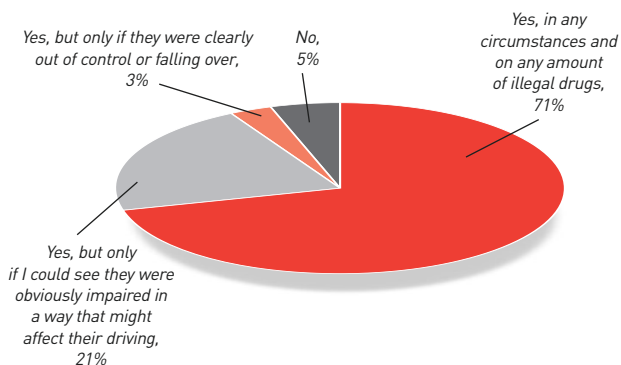


### Q3: Would you speak up if a close friend was taking illegal drugs and intending to drive?

The survey shows an alarming level of unwillingness to confront friends intending to drug drive, with three in 10 (29%) admitting they might not do so. Any amount of illegal drugs can make you a danger on the road, and yet a quarter (24%) would only prevent their friends from driving if the impairment was obvious.

- 71% said yes, in any circumstances and on any amount of illegal drugs
- 21% said yes, but only if I could see they were obviously impaired in a way that might affect their driving
- 3% said yes, but only if they were clearly out of control or falling over
- 5% said no (this response was most common among males (7%) and 18-24 year olds (9%), suggesting lack of confidence in confronting friends)

Figure 2: Would you speak up if a close friend was taking illegal drugs and intending to drive?



### LOST LIVES

**Lillian Groves, 14, from Croydon**, was killed outside her home in June 2010. Driver John Page was high on cannabis when he ploughed into her at over 40mph on a 30mph road, having decided to go for a 'spin' in a friend's Vauxhall Astra to show off to his niece and another passenger. He was charged with causing death by careless driving and sentenced to four months in prison and a two year driving ban. The relentless campaigning of Lillian's family has been instrumental in the introduction of a new law on drug driving that will make it an offence to drive with drugs in your body, removing the need to prove impairment in order to prosecute drug drivers.

**Natasha Groves, Lillian's mum, said:** "Lillian was a wonderful young woman who did not deserve to die. She lit up rooms and gave warmth to everyone she met. A child being so suddenly killed, in such a needless and destructive way, is something that tears a hole in the heart of your family; it creates a shadow over your home you can't get away from. But as a family, we felt we couldn't be defeated; we needed to do something to prevent others suffering the way we have. That's why we fought so hard for a change in the law. Nothing will ever make up for the travesty of Lillian being stolen from us, but we urge all drivers never to drive after taking illegal drugs and save families from going through the same ordeal we have."

### End notes

1. A-Z of Drugs: Cannabis, Talk to Frank [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)
2. A-Z of Drugs: Cocaine, Ecstasy, Speed, Talk to Frank [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)
3. A-Z of Drugs: Heroin, Talk to Frank [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)
4. The Incidence of Drugs and Alcohol in Road Accident Fatalities, Transport Research Laboratory, 2000
5. Driving under the influence of drugs: report from the expert panel on drug driving, Department for Transport, 2013

