

# Fit to drive



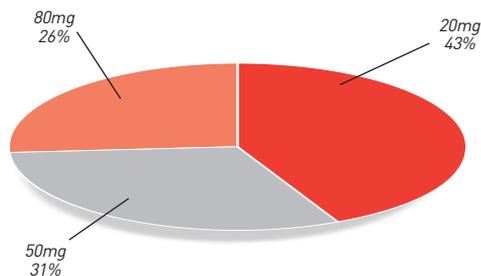
## DRINK DRIVING – THE LAW

### Q1: What should the drink drive limit be?

Three quarters of drivers (74%) think that the drink drive limit should be lower than the current limit in England, Wales and Northern Ireland of 80mg alcohol per 100ml blood. Almost a third (31%) said the limit should be 50mg, as in Scotland and most of the EU. However, the highest proportion – more than two in five (43%) – agreed that the limit should be 20mg – effectively zero tolerance – as in a number of other countries. This would send an unambiguous 'none for the road' message, in line with evidence that even small amounts of alcohol increase crash risk.

- 43% said it should be 20mg (slightly higher among women – 44% compared to 41%)
- 31% said it should be 50mg (slightly higher among women – 33% compared to 29%)
- 26% said it should remain at 80mg (slightly higher among men – 30% compared to 23%)

Figure 1: What should the drink drive limit be?



### THE FACTS: DRINK DRIVING AND THE LAW

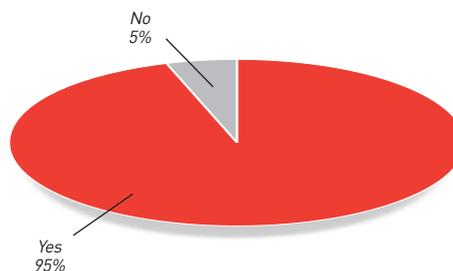
- The legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit for driving in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood (80mg/100ml). In many countries it's much lower: the limit is 50mg/100ml in most of Europe, including Scotland, and in some countries, such as Sweden, it is just 20mg/100ml <sup>1</sup> – effectively zero tolerance.
- In the UK, police can stop and breathalyse you if they have reason to suspect you have been drinking – for example, if you are driving erratically. They can also breathalyse you if you have committed another traffic offence (such as speeding or driving without a seat belt) or if you are involved in a crash <sup>2</sup>.
- If you are found to be over the drink-drive limit and/or driving while impaired by alcohol, you can receive a maximum penalty of six months in prison and an unlimited fine. Anyone convicted also receives an automatic one-year driving ban. If you kill someone while under the influence of alcohol, you can be charged with death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs, which carries a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison.
- The penalties for drink driving are currently the same no matter how many times a driver re-offends. However, some drivers are also placed on a 'high risk offender' scheme if they are repeat drink drivers or had a high level of alcohol in their blood. Under this scheme drivers have to undergo tests to show they are not alcohol dependent before getting their licence back.
- Currently, one in eight drink drivers reoffend, as do as many as three in 10 'high risk offenders' <sup>3</sup>.

### Q2: Currently penalties for drink driving do not take into account whether the driver has been caught drink driving before. Do you think penalties should be higher for repeat drink drivers?

Almost all drivers (95%) think that penalties should be higher for repeat drink drive offenders, with slightly more women (97%) in favour than men (93%). This could help tackle the current situation where as many as one in eight drink drivers reoffend.

- 95% said yes
- 5% said no

Figure 2: Do you think penalties should be higher for repeat drink drivers?



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## ADVICE FOR DRIVERS: STAYING SAFE AND LEGAL

- Don't try to guess how much alcohol will put you over the limit – there is no failsafe way to tell. The BAC limit cannot be translated directly into how many units you can have: the concentration of alcohol in your blood depends on various factors. That's why the only way to be sure you're under the limit is not to drink at all before you drive.
- Being under the current legal limit does not mean you are safe to drive. Even very small amounts of alcohol affect driving: drivers with even 20-50mg alcohol per 100ml of blood are at least three times more likely to die in a crash than those with no alcohol in their blood <sup>4</sup>. Drivers who are under the drink-drive limit, but who have significant amounts of alcohol in their blood <sup>5</sup>, are estimated to cause 65 road deaths per year.
- To be safe, drivers should ensure they are completely alcohol-free before driving – including the following day. There's no way of knowing exactly how long it takes to sober up completely after drinking, as it depends on various factors, including gender, hydration and tiredness. As a rough guide drivers should allow at least one hour to absorb alcohol, plus at least one hour for each unit consumed <sup>6</sup> – but it can take longer, so it's wise to leave extra time to be safe. If you have a lot to drink you could be impaired all of the next day. Brake advises people who need to drive the next day to limit themselves to one or two drinks.

**Q3: In some countries, drivers who have been caught drink driving twice or more have a device fitted to their vehicle so they can only start the engine if they can show they are sober by blowing into a tube (these can be fitted with anti-tampering and recognition devices so it only works for the driver who owns the car). Should we be using these for repeat drink drivers in the UK?**

Alcohol interlocks are devices fitted to vehicles in a number of other countries to help prevent drink drivers reoffending. Almost nine in ten (89%) drivers said they would like to see this system in the UK too, with slightly more women (91%) than men (86%) in favour.

- 89% said yes
- 11% said no

## End notes

1. *Global status report on road safety, World Health Organisation, 2013*
2. *Being stopped by the police while driving: breath tests, Gov.uk, 2014*
3. *Drink driving (repeat offenders) bill, Rehman Chishti MP, 2013*  
<http://www.pacts.org.uk/2013/07/drink-driving-repeat-offenders/>
4. *Review of effectiveness of laws limiting blood alcohol concentration levels to reduce alcohol-related road injuries and deaths, National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2010*
5. *Reducing the BAC limit to 50mg - what can we expect to gain?, Professor Richard E Allsop, Centre for Transport Studies, University College London (PACTS, 2005)*
6. *How long does alcohol stay in your blood? NHS Choices, 2013*
7. *Drink driving (repeat offenders) bill, Rehman Chishti MP, 2013*  
<http://www.pacts.org.uk/2013/07/drink-driving-repeat-offenders/>

## THE CONSEQUENCES

Christmas 2010 was memorable for all the wrong reasons for **Daniel Glynn, 22**, from Kent. He spent Christmas Day in hospital, undergoing emergency surgery for injuries he suffered because he had caught a lift home from a party on Christmas Eve with a friend who'd been drinking.

They'd been out celebrating, and Daniel knew his friend had had a drink but didn't realise how much and accepted a lift anyway. Travelling back, Daniel's friend lost control and the vehicle span across the road and hit a tree at full force. Police reported the car was unrecognisable and the engine was found five metres away.

Daniel was taken to hospital and was told he had broken all the ribs on his left side, his knee cap was badly damaged and his bowel had been ruptured. Daniel had to return to hospital a number of times for further treatment and repeat a year at college because of time out due to his injuries.

**Daniel said:** "I was naive. I thought it wouldn't happen to me, but I now know drink driving, or getting a lift with a drink driver, is never worth the risk. My life was turned upside down, and I went through months of terrible agony that could have easily been avoided. But I was one of the lucky ones: it could easily have ended both our lives. Now I'd never catch a lift with a driver who's been drinking, not even one drink, and I'd urge everyone to make the same commitment. Speaking up about drink driving isn't always easy, but it could save a life or prevent a horrific injury, so please speak out to friends and family, and if you're a driver, commit to never, ever, drinking alcohol before getting behind the wheel."

## CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

- **End driver confusion over the drink drive limit.** The scientific evidence indicates that drivers who have had any amount of alcohol are significantly more likely to crash. Accordingly, government advice is not to drink at all before driving. Yet the current legal limit of 80mg/100ml continues to send the misleading message to drivers that they can have a drink or two and be OK. This can be solved by **lowering the limit to 20mg/100ml** – effectively zero-tolerance, in line with other EU countries – making it clear that not a drop means not a drop.
- **Get tough on repeat offenders.** It is clear that the current system to tackle repeat drink driving isn't working: one in eight drink drivers do it again, and as many as three in 10 'high risk offenders' reoffend <sup>7</sup>. To tackle this, we need to **give judges the power to hand out higher sentences, up to two years, to repeat drink drivers.** Alcohol interlocks – as used in other countries – also have an important role to play in preventing reoffending, by physically preventing high risk offenders who are given back their licence from starting their vehicle's engine without first passing a breath test.

