

QuickSmarts

Drink Driving



Drink driving is one of the major killers on Queensland roads.

On average, 55 people are killed and 550 seriously injured each year on Queensland roads as a result of drink driving¹. Drinking alcohol reduces our ability to drive safely. Alcohol affects judgement, vision, coordination and reflexes, and increases the risk of crashing.

The facts

- In Queensland, Learner, Provisional and Probationary Licence holders are not permitted to drive after drinking any alcohol. They must have a zero blood/breath alcohol concentration (BAC) limit.
- Open licence holders must have a BAC lower than 0.05. The same applies for supervisors of car and motorcycle Learner drivers.
- The following licence holders must also maintain a zero BAC when driving:
 - any vehicle weighing over 4.5 tonnes or an articulated motor vehicle (eg B-double or road train)
 - a bus built to carry more than 12 adults, including the driver
 - a vehicle carrying a placard load of dangerous goods
 - a taxi, limousine or public passenger vehicle
 - a tow truck, pilot or escort vehicle escorting an oversized vehicle
 - a vehicle being used by a driver trainer to give driver training or a specially constructed vehicle (including a tractor and motorcycle)
 - a class RE licence holder in their first year of riding
- 16% of drivers get behind the wheel when they know they may be over the legal alcohol limit, and 20% drive the next morning when they're possibly over the legal limit?

The effects of alcohol on driving

Drinking alcohol can affect drivers and driving performance by:

- slowing down reaction time – crucial in an emergency situation
- making it difficult to multi-task – an essential skill for safe driving
- causing poor judgement – affecting your ability to judge distance and speed
- reducing attention span – so we don't notice other drivers and/or vehicles
- affecting vision and hearing – reducing our ability to identify driving hazards
- creating over-confidence – we may feel more confident after a few drinks but in fact, we're less able to cope with unexpected events. We might take risks that we normally wouldn't.

References:

<https://streetsmarts.initiatives.qld.gov.au/drink-driving/factsheet>

Why no alcohol is safer when it comes to driving

Blood/breath alcohol concentration (BAC) is a measure of the amount of alcohol in the body. Even at 0.05, studies show reactions are slower than at 0.0 BAC.

It's difficult to accurately monitor how much alcohol we consume due to:

- the different size and shape of glasses
- different alcohol content for each type of drink (wine/beer/spirits)
- different volumes typically poured for each type of drink
- gradual alcohol impairment (the more we drink, the less accurate your guesses become about the amount of alcohol consumed).

It's also important to remember that BAC may continue to rise after we stop drinking. It's why we shouldn't rely on the result from a breath-testing machine in a hotel. Other variables that affect your BAC include weight, gender, metabolism, how often you drink, and how long since you have eaten. Coffee, sleep, vomiting or exercise will not reduce your BAC.

The only thing that reduces your BAC is time.

Plan ahead and stay safe

If you're going to drink, make arrangements to get home safely and avoid driving the morning after. Consider these options:

- Stay at a friend's place rather than drive
- Leave the car at home and consider alternative transport such as a taxi, ride share, courtesy bus, pre-arranged lift or public transport
- Designate a 'dry driver' if going out with others
- If hosting at your house, provide non-alcoholic drink options and plenty of food, offer guests somewhere to stay overnight rather than drive home, or call a taxi or ride share for them. Remember they may still be over the limit the next morning.
- If you're walking after drinking, walk with a sober friend or group, stay on the footpath, and only cross the road at marked crossings or under a street light where you're clearly visible to motorists.

More information

Visit qld.gov.au/streetsmarts and search 'Drink driving' for more information, including myth busters and references for all research and relevant content.

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