

# Drug Driving

## Current Government policy

### Westminster (UK)

Drug-drive limits and penalties were set by the Westminster government and have been in force since 2015.

It's illegal to drive if either:

- you're unfit to do so because you're on legal or illegal drugs
- you have certain levels of illegal drugs in your blood (even if they have not affected driving)

The level of enforcement activity and availability of roadside drug testing equipment is set by individual police forces. Most police forces take part in national coordinated enforcement campaigns throughout the year.

Currently, only roadside testing kits are available to detect cannabis and cocaine. The police can stop you and make you do a 'field impairment assessment' but this is rarely used now. If they think you're unfit to drive because of taking drugs, you'll be arrested and will have to take a blood or urine test at a police station.

If you're convicted of drug driving, you may get:

- a minimum 1-year driving ban; an unlimited fine; up to 6 months in prison; a criminal record
- The maximum penalty for causing death by careless driving under the influence of drugs is life imprisonment

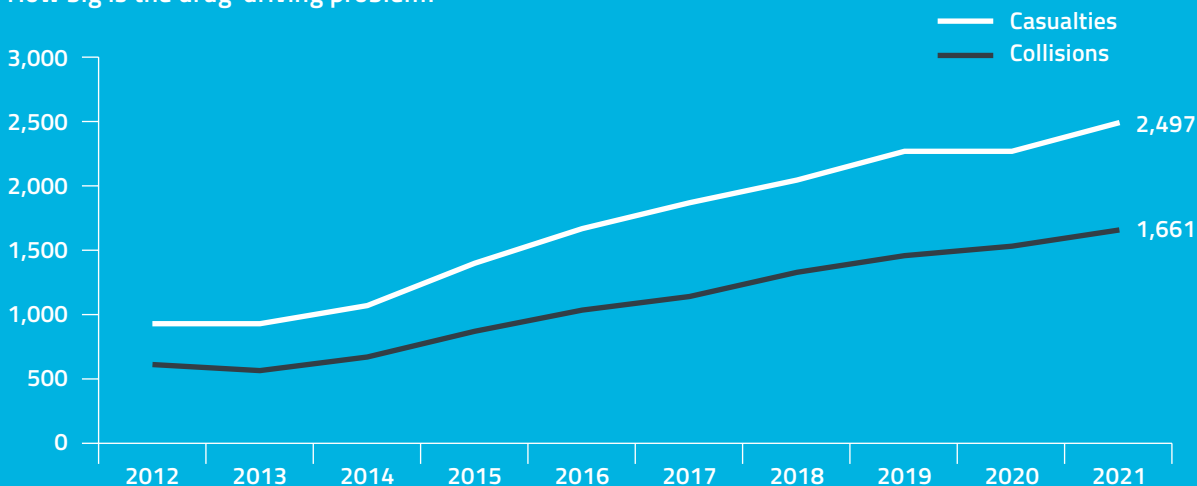
### Scotland

Same limits apply but enforcement only began in 2019 when legislation was passed by the Scottish Parliament.

## IAM RoadSmart Research:

- 2022 IAM Safety Culture Report ranked drug-and drink-driving as the highest priority issue (60% said) that traffic police should prioritise in reducing bad driving behaviour.
- One-in-10 people surveyed by IAM RoadSmart said they'd driven or been a passenger in a vehicle where the driver has been under the influence of illegal drugs.
- 6% of people would be comfortable driving while under the influence of illegal drugs, and 14% of those surveyed stated that they would not stop a family member or friend who was planning to drive while under the influence of drugs.
- 28% probably won't avoid driving if taking over-the-counter medications, like antihistamines or cold and flu remedies, even with a warning not to use heavy equipment/machinery.
- Almost 1 in 3 (31%) don't know how long you can wait to drive after taking prescribed medication.

### How big is the drug-driving problem?



## External Research

### Illegal drugs

- Driving under the influence of anything that impairs your driving ability can be hugely dangerous, but the unpredictability of illegal drugs makes it a gamble for you and other road users.
- The unregulated nature of illegal drugs means you can never know exactly what you are using, how strong it is, or how long it will be in your system – especially when some recreational drugs can stay in your system for days, or even weeks.
- While all drugs have different psychological and physical effects, there is no illegal drug that improves, or is even safe, to drive with in your system.
- Muscle twitches, reduced response times, and the heightened risks of catastrophic medical emergency associated with drug use impacts on driving ability.

### Prescription medications

- Prescribed medication, while being much needed and beneficial to many people in the UK, can have unexpected and potentially serious impacts on driving ability
- Some everyday medications, for common health issues such as cold and flu, allergies, and pain, can drastically impair reaction times, judgement, and ability to concentrate when driving.
- While healthcare professionals may not always specifically advise against driving when prescribing certain medications – checking by patient is needed.

### Rehabilitation Courses

- IAM RoadSmart is a main provider of drink drive rehabilitation courses in the country. Independent research shows that these courses reduce reoffending when compared to fines, driving bans or penalty points alone – after attending a drink-driving course, reoffences are at 17%<sup>1</sup>. Yet this isn't available for drug-driving.

<sup>1</sup><https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62345c4ee90e0779a2c994ee/review-of-the-drink-drive-rehabilitation-course.pdf>

## IAM RoadSmart calls to action:

Drug-driving collisions and casualties have gone up by over 260% in 10 years, and convictions are increasing every year. The impact is devastating and getting worse.

- **Publish Govt response to consultation:** We have been waiting since last summer for the government to announce respond to "Protecting the public from repeat drug-driving offenders".
- **Separate rehabilitation schemes:** We want drug-driving to be reprioritised as a standalone issue, and we are calling for an in-depth investigation, looking at all the impact of drugs and underlying issues that lead to the offence - recognising that it is a distinct issue from drink-driving.
- **Develop a course:** As the UK's leading independent road safety charity, we want to work with the government, police, and councils to support the development of a rehabilitation option for drug-driving, with a particular focus on illegal substances.
- **Support the prescribing process:** Closer collaboration between road safety actors and the health sector, to raise awareness and advise on some of the potential outcomes that prescribed medications that can have an impact on a driver's ability behind the wheel.
- **Better detection:** Type approval for faster, cheaper testing kits which will aid the police.
- **Campaigns:** Continue to fund and implement across the UK. These should include education in schools and greater enforcement and detection in the workplace.

## COMMENT

IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy and Standards, Nicholas Lyes said:

*"Using Class A substances before getting behind the wheel is an illegal and reckless practice that puts all road users at risk. Sadly, it appears to be a growing concern as the data demonstrates with the number of drug-driving collisions on UK roads increasing year on year."*

*"Our recommendations provide an alternative framework for regulatory bodies to consider that recognises drug-driving as a growing issue of concern that merits investigation and a refreshed approach."*