

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. For example, a B-double or road train
 - a bus built or fitted to carry over 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
- The risk of involvement in a crash where there is a casualty increases rapidly with increasing BAC levels².
- Eleven percent of drivers get behind the wheel when they know they may be over the legal alcohol limit, and eighteen percent drive the next morning when they're possibly over the legal limit³.

The effects of alcohol on driving

Alcohol is one of the most widely used drugs. It's a depressant which slows down the body by acting on the central nervous system, affecting physical and mental function. Excessive alcohol can cause cognitive impairment, affecting judgement, memory and reaction time⁴.

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 — we may have trouble judging distances, how fast we're driving and the speed of other vehicles
- 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.

Why no alcohol is safer than a little alcohol when it comes to driving

Blood/breath alcohol concentration (BAC) is a measure of the amount of alcohol in the body. While legal alcohol limits are set to enforce drink driving laws (for most drivers, under 0.05) it's always safer to not drink when we're going to be driving. Even at 0.05, studies show reactions are slower than at 0.0 BAC.

There are two key reasons why counting drinks isn't a safe option:

1. 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/beers/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.

2. There are other variables that affect your BAC, including:

- weight, gender and metabolism
- how often we drink alcohol
- how long since eating.

Risky behaviour

Drink driving remains a major contributor to fatalities and injuries on Australian roads, even though a BAC limit has been in place for more than 30 years. A 2018 survey of 3,000 Queensland drivers found that⁵:

- 22% of drivers admit to driving when they are or may be over the legal blood alcohol limit
- 7% of Queenslanders drive when they are over the alcohol limit, while 18% may drive the next day when they may be over the limit
- 25% of 17-24 year olds report driving the next morning when they may be over the limit
- drivers who admit to driving over the BAC limit on 10% or more of trips are:
 - more likely to be younger: 17-24 years
 - more likely to be male
 - more likely to drive long distances every week
 - equally likely to be in regional Queensland or the city.

MythBusters

“I’ll be safe to drive after a few hours’ sleep”

Drivers are putting their licence, their lives, and the lives of others at risk if they believe a few hours’ sleep after a night of drinking, makes them safe to drive the next day.

The only thing that reduces your BAC is time. If you’ve had a big night of drinking, don’t take the gamble of driving in the morning.

“If I have something to eat before I go to bed, and drink lots of water, I’ll be fine to drive in the morning”

The only thing that reduces BAC is time. After a night of drinking, you could still be over the alcohol limit the next morning, especially if your BAC limit is zero. Coffee, cold showers, vomiting or exercise will not reduce your BAC.

Tips for keeping safe

Planning ahead is the key. If you’re going to drink, make arrangements to get home safely and avoid driving the morning after. You could:

- plan to 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
- if you’re going out with others, decide who will be the ‘dry driver’. Choosing a driver before you go out means you can all travel in one car
- if you’re hosting friends or family at your house:
 - provide non-alcoholic drinks so there’s something for the ‘dry drivers’
 - provide food and encourage your guests to eat
 - open the ‘mates motel’ and offer a bed or lounge for the night for guests who want to have a few drinks
 - call a taxi, ride share or lift for drivers who shouldn’t drive. Don’t be afraid to take the keys from guests you think shouldn’t drive
 - remember your guests may still be over the limit the next day, so encourage them to hang around until they’re safe to drive
- If you’re walking after drinking, walk with a sober friend or in a 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. Remember, alcohol affects your judgement, impairs your coordination and slows your reflexes, so drink-walking is potentially dangerous.

1 Department of Transport and Main Roads Qld. Unpublished data extracted 27 June 2018 using road casualty statistics 2013-2017.

2 Australian Transport Council (2011). National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020.

3 Footprints Market Research, Understanding Risky Driving Behaviour, March 2018.

4 CARRS-Q, State of the Road: Mobile Phone Use & Distraction While Driving Fact Sheet, 2014.

5 Footprints Market Research, Understanding Risky Driving Behaviour, March 2018.

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