

## Fast Facts on drinking and driving

Updated: June 2007

### Having just one drink can't make a difference...can it?

It sure can! Some studies on drowsy driving have determined that being awake for long periods of time (minimum 17 to 19 hour period), can produce a performance impairment equivalent to 0.05% BAC (Dawson & Reid, 1997, Williamson & Feyer, 2000) Fatigue alone or in combination with alcohol and/or drugs are contributing factors in collisions. In this example, consuming one alcoholic drink combined with being tired and making the decision to drive will place you and others in harm's way.

### Driving requires precise physical skills and even one drink affects you *physically*, making you:



- /// Less co-ordinated and slower to react, you'll likely tend to brake late and may not stop in time.
- /// less able to see and hear clearly or to pay attention to changes in the driving environment, so you may not notice another car or pedestrian until it's too late.
- /// less able to judge anything, including how far away another car is or how fast you're going.
- /// more likely to take risks, like running lights or making illegal turns, because alcohol gives you a false sense of confidence.

### How does alcohol react with my body?

Alcohol is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream through the walls of the stomach and small intestine. Once in the blood, alcohol spreads throughout the body, reaching the brain almost immediately. The liver is the organ, which breaks down or "metabolizes" alcohol. The liver works slowly and at a constant rate. This rate varies from one person to the next.

### What does BAC mean?

BAC, which stands for Blood Alcohol Concentration, is a measurement of the level of alcohol in the bloodstream. The BAC is expressed as the measure of milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood. This is written as a milligrams percent. In Canada, it is illegal to drive with a BAC of over 80 mg%, or as the Criminal Code expresses it .08.

### What factors influence the BAC level?

The two most important factors that influence a person's BAC level are the number of drinks and how fast the alcohol is consumed. Other factors include:

- /// Lean body weight. A person of smaller build will reach a higher BAC for the same number of drinks as a person of larger build. Remember to judge by lean body mass, as weight due to excess fat does not increase the body's ability to absorb alcohol;
- /// Gender. Women will have a higher BAC than men when drinking equal amounts of alcohol. While this is not fully understood, one reason may be that women generally have more fat and less water than men of the same weight.
- /// The presence of other drugs in the body, including prescription drugs, non-prescription drugs such as cold medications, as well as illegal drugs like marijuana and cocaine.

### Factors that do not change BAC level, but do influence how people react to alcohol include:

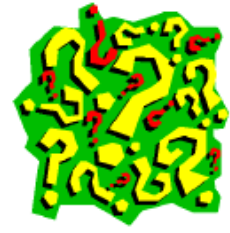
- /// Mood. Nervousness, depression or fatigue may be accentuated by alcohol.

### Words to live by...

***You have no way of knowing for sure if someone is impaired -- not by how many drinks they've had, how they look or what their BAC is. The smart thing to do is not to drive with anyone who has been drinking at all -- including yourself!***

**Facts and Stats...**

- About one third of vehicle fatalities in Manitoba involve drivers who have been drinking. From 1995 to 2004, on average 38 Manitobans were killed in alcohol-related collisions. As well, an average 131 more were seriously injured. This works out to approximately one person killed every ten days and one person seriously injured once every three days due to impairing driving factors.
- In 2004, males account for close to eight in ten (76.2%) of all fatally injured drivers that had alcohol in their system. Of those fatally injured drivers, approximately six out of seven drivers (83.3%) were legally impaired, that is had a BAC greater than .08.
- Almost one-half (47.5%) of all crashes involving alcohol occur between 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. and over one-half (52.5%) most alcohol-related collisions occurring between Friday evening from 9 p.m. to 3 a.m.
- On average, drivers aged 16 to 24 years old represent approximately one in seven licenced drivers but account for almost one third of all criminal code offences.
- In the past year, an estimated 10.2 million impaired driving trips took place on all Canadian roadways.
- However, the vast majority of these trips (92.4%) were accounted for by a small minority of (4.4%) of drivers.



**This is the Law**



**MANITOBA HIGHWAY TRAFFIC ACT:** *If you drive a motor vehicle or an off-road vehicle (such as a snowmobile or dirt bike) with a BAC between .05 and .08, you will face a variety of consequences under Manitoba's Highway Traffic Act that may include;*

- /// An immediate 24-hour licence suspension
- /// A \$50 fee for reinstatement of your licence
- /// A mandatory impaired driver's assessment at a cost of \$525.00 if you have more than one 24-hour suspension in three years.

**CRIMINAL CODE OF CANADA:** *Drinking and driving is not a minor misdemeanour. You will face charges under the Criminal Code of Canada as well as provincial sanctions under the Highway Traffic Act, should you drive a motor vehicle with a BAC of .08 or over.*

*If you are convicted of an impaired driving offence under the Criminal Code, you will face a number of penalties which can include:*

- /// Having a criminal record
- /// Fines from \$600 to \$2,000
- /// Imprisonment (the maximum penalty for causing death is life in prison) and
- /// A Court ban from driving any type of vehicle for a minimum of one to three years. Individuals with multiple offences or those convicted of impaired driving causing death could face up to a lifetime ban.

As a driver, you can be charged for impaired driving even if your blood alcohol level is well below the legal limit. Refusing to provide sample to police can carry double the penalties of driving while impaired. As well, the same laws apply for any drug impaired driving.

Having an impaired driving criminal record can affect your ability to keep your job, can limit your travel options and can impact your future employability.

**WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT IMPAIRED DRIVING LAWS?** Both provincial and federal laws are complex and subject to change; for example, a Government of Manitoba news release (April 27, 2005) announced proposed amendments to the Highway Traffic Act (HTA) that would strengthen the consequences when impaired drivers transport child passengers and when HTA offences result in death.

Suggest that students' research impaired driving laws in Manitoba and across the country. More information about the consequences of impaired driving is available on the Government of Manitoba Web site and the Government of Canada Web site. (See Additional Educational Resources at the end of this section for Web addresses.)