

Drugged Driving

Your teenager got her driver's license and she's ecstatic. Your son will start driving next year. You've taught your kids about traffic safety and about never ever drinking and driving. Or riding with someone who's under the influence of alcohol.

But there's another problem parents need to be aware of: drugged driving. Like alcohol, marijuana and other illicit drugs can impair many of the skills necessary for good driving – alertness, ability to concentrate and reaction time. These effects can last for hours after smoking marijuana.

Combining marijuana use with teens' inexperience on the road can lead to disaster on the highways. In one roadside study one in three reckless drivers who were tested for drugs tested positive for marijuana. In 2002 the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that 10 to 22 percent of drivers involved in all vehicle crashes had recently used an illegal drug.

While it is illegal in all states to drive while under the influence of alcohol, for drugs other than alcohol, there is no consistent method across states for identifying drug impairment. As a result, the full impact of illegal drug use on public safety is unknown.

What can parents do? Talk to your kids about the risks of riding with someone who is driving while high on marijuana. Discuss the physical effects that using marijuana can have, like making it hard to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road. Remind your kids to never get in a car with someone who has been using drugs or drinking. Tell them to call you so you can pick them up.

Remind your kids not to use alcohol or marijuana and to never use drugs and drive.

Familiarize yourself with how drug education is being taught in your child's school. Build a network of adults you can talk with about school safety issues and alcohol and drug use.

For more information about drugged driving, visit www.TheAntiDrug.com, the parent Web site of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign.