

1 in 5 Ontario Drivers Admit to Cannabis Impaired Driving

Survey Reveals Growing Concerns Over Cannabis-Impaired Driving in Ontario

A new survey has raised alarming concerns regarding the driving habits of cannabis users across Ontario, showing a disturbing increase in cannabis consumption among drivers behind the wheel. The study, conducted by CAA South Central Ontario, involved nearly 1,600 drivers from the province, offering a snapshot of how cannabis use is affecting road safety.

19% of Ontario Drivers Admit to Cannabis-Impaired Driving

The survey revealed that 19% of respondents admitted to consuming cannabis and operating a vehicle. This marks a 5% increase compared to the previous year, signaling a troubling trend in impaired driving behavior. Despite ongoing awareness campaigns about the dangers of driving under the influence of cannabis, the numbers suggest that more drivers are taking risks when it comes to their safety and that of others on the road.

The rise in cannabis consumption while driving is a cause for concern for traffic safety advocates, as cannabis can impair a driver's ability to react quickly, judge distances, and maintain proper coordination—skills essential for safe driving.

A Growing Concern: Cannabis Use and Road Safety

Of the survey participants, 31% admitted to having felt high while driving, further highlighting the dangers posed by impaired drivers on the road. Cannabis use can affect a driver's reaction times and judgment, and even small amounts of marijuana can impair skills that are crucial for driving. With an increasing number of drivers acknowledging the impact of cannabis on their abilities behind the wheel, there is a rising awareness of the need to address this issue.

While cannabis is legal for recreational use in many places, including Ontario, it's clear that more needs to be done to prevent people from driving under the influence. The study also found that 63% of those surveyed expressed concern about the likelihood of getting caught driving after consuming cannabis. However, this fear of legal consequences seems insufficient to deter some from taking the risk.

Why Do Drivers Choose to Drive High?

The survey provided further insight into why some drivers choose to get behind the wheel after consuming cannabis. When asked about their reasons for driving while impaired, 32% of respondents said they didn't feel that they had consumed enough cannabis to be impaired. Another 32% claimed they had no other transportation options and had to drive home. The remaining 28% believed the drive would be short enough that they could manage it safely.

These reasons point to a dangerous underestimation of the effects of cannabis on driving ability. Cannabis impairs decision-making and reaction time, and even short trips can lead to accidents if a driver is not fully alert. The survey highlights the need for more effective education on the dangers of cannabis-impaired driving, emphasizing that no amount of cannabis consumption is safe when operating a vehicle.

A Disconnect Between Perception and Reality

Despite the growing number of drivers admitting to consuming cannabis and driving, the majority of respondents in the survey still recognized the serious dangers of cannabis-impaired driving. A staggering 91% of drivers agreed that driving under the influence of cannabis poses a serious risk to road safety. This stark contrast between understanding the risks and engaging in risky behavior underscores the need for stronger messaging and intervention strategies.

While there is a broad consensus that alcohol-impaired driving is dangerous, there appears to be a lingering misconception about the risks associated with cannabis consumption. Many people may not be fully aware of how cannabis affects motor skills and decision-making abilities. The belief that one can “handle” driving after using cannabis is a dangerous myth that could result in tragic consequences.

The Importance of Responsible Cannabis Consumption

Michael Stewart, Community Relations Consultant for CAA South Central Ontario, emphasized that cannabis can be safely consumed recreationally, but it should never be done before driving. He stressed the importance of being responsible when using cannabis, particularly given its potential to impair critical driving functions such as reaction time, coordination, and judgment.

The survey’s findings underscore the need for better education on the risks of cannabis use and driving. Just like alcohol, cannabis can significantly impact a driver’s ability to safely navigate the roads. While cannabis may not cause the immediate impairment seen with alcohol, its effects can still be severe and are often underestimated by users.

Efforts to Improve Road Safety

As Ontario grapples with these growing concerns, traffic safety organizations, including CAA, are pushing for greater awareness and more stringent regulations around cannabis consumption. Increased education about the dangers of driving under the influence of cannabis is needed to change attitudes and reduce the number of impaired drivers on the roads.

The data also highlights the need for improved technology to detect cannabis impairment. While there are roadside tests for alcohol, testing for cannabis impairment remains a challenge. As cannabis use becomes more widespread, lawmakers and law enforcement agencies must explore new ways to ensure that drivers are not putting others at risk due to impaired judgment and reaction times.

A Call for Action

The rise in cannabis-impaired driving is an urgent issue that requires immediate attention from both the public and policymakers. Although most drivers recognize the risks associated with cannabis use, the growing number of people admitting to driving while high shows that there is a significant gap between knowledge and behavior. Public education campaigns must focus on the real dangers of cannabis-impaired driving, emphasizing that even a small amount of cannabis can significantly impact driving abilities.

As the province continues to navigate the challenges of cannabis legalization, ensuring road safety must remain a top priority. Encouraging responsible cannabis consumption, along with stronger enforcement of impaired driving laws, will be crucial in preventing accidents and saving lives. With the right combination of education, enforcement, and technology, Ontario can help reduce the number of cannabis-impaired drivers on the roads and keep its highways safe for all.

Email: info@cannabisriskmanager.com | Phone: +415-226-4060

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