



# Drinking and driving

## The facts



You no longer  
have precise control  
of your muscles

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More likely to make  
flawed decisions

Reactions slow down

More likely  
to take risks

## Introduction

Drink driving is a factor in around 20 percent of all fatal crashes across NSW and results in the deaths of over 100 people every year.

The majority of drink drivers in fatal crashes across NSW are male (88%) and aged under 40 (75%). Most of these drivers crash in their local area.

In country areas of NSW there are more than twice as many fatal drink driving crashes than in metropolitan areas, despite country areas having much smaller populations. In fact, 72 percent of all fatal drink drive crashes occur in country NSW.



**DRINKING KILLS  
DRIVING SKILLS**

# How does alcohol affect your driving?

**You don't have to be drunk to be affected by alcohol.**

No one drives as well as usual after drinking alcohol, even though some people may look and act as though they are unaffected. Alcohol is a depressant drug that affects most areas of the brain.

Alcohol:

- Slows brain functions so that you can't respond to situations, make decisions or react quickly.
- Reduces your ability to judge how fast you are moving or your distance from other cars, people or objects.
- Gives you false confidence – you may take greater risks because you think your driving is better than it really is.
- Makes it harder to do more than one thing at a time – while you concentrate on steering, you could miss seeing a red light, cars entering from side streets or pedestrians.
- Makes you feel sleepy or fatigued.

**You cannot compensate for the effects of alcohol on your brain.**

As a driver's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) rises, so does the risk of being involved in a crash.

- 0.05 = double the risk.
- 0.08 = 7 times the risk.
- 0.15 = 25 times the risk.



## Motorcyclists

Motorcycle riders are at even greater risk from drink riding because alcohol affects sense of balance. As balance plays a direct role in controlling a motorcycle, the consequences of consuming alcohol before riding are severe. About 20 percent of motorcyclists who are involved in fatal crashes have a BAC over 0.05.

## Mixing alcohol with drugs

Mixing alcohol with other illegal and some prescription drugs has a multiplying effect and dramatically increases the risk of crashing, even if only small amounts have been taken. This is also discussed in the RTA's *Drugs and Driving* and *Driving and Medicines* brochures.

# Penalties

In NSW, Police have power to:

- ➔ Stop drivers at random to test for alcohol.
- ➔ Arrest drivers who test over the legal limit.

The following table lists the range of penalties that exist for Prescribed Concentration of Alcohol\* (PCA) offences.

PENALTIES	PCA OFFENCE			
	Low range PCA (0.05 to less than 0.08) Special range PCA (0.02 to less than 0.05) Novice range PCA (zero to less than 0.02)		Mid range PCA (0.08 to less than 0.15)	
	First offence	Second or subsequent offence	First offence	Second or subsequent offence
Maximum court – imposed fine	\$1,100	\$2,200	\$2,200	\$3,300
Maximum gaol term	N/a	N/a	9 months	12 months
Disqualification				
– minimum	3 months	6 months	6 months	12 months
– maximum	6 months	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited
– automatic*	6 months	12 months	12 months	3 years
Immediate licence suspension	No	No	Yes	Yes

<sup>+</sup> PCA is the blood alcohol concentration prescribed by the law as being an offence.

\* 'automatic' is the disqualification period that applies in the absence of a specific court order.

• DUI – drug and alcohol offences are separate offences from PCA.

If you test over the limit at the roadside you will be arrested, taken to a Police station for evidentiary breath analysis, charged by Police, finger printed, photographed and you will have to appear in court. Middle and high range offenders will have their licence suspended by Police at the Police Station when they are charged.

High range PCA (0.15 and higher) (refuse a breath analysis, hinder or obstruct taking of a blood sample, wilfully alter the concentration of alcohol in the blood)		Drive under the influence of alcohol (DUI*) or other drugs	
First offence	Second or subsequent offence	First offence	Second or subsequent offence
\$3,300	\$5,500	\$2,200	\$3,300
18 months	2 years	9 months	12 months
12 months Unlimited 3 years	2 years Unlimited 5 years	6 months Unlimited 12 months	12 months Unlimited 3 years
Yes	Yes	No	No



Once alcohol has been consumed its effects on driving cannot be reversed. Getting your BAC back to zero takes time and no amount of coffee, food, physical activity or sleep will speed up the process. The only thing that will sober you up once you have stopped drinking alcohol is time.

# Legislation – blood alcohol limits

NSW has three BAC limits:

- Zero.
- 0.02.
- 0.05.

The limit which applies to you is dependent on the category of your licence and the type of vehicle you are driving. However, even if your legal limit is above zero it is recommended that you don't drink any alcohol if you plan to drive.

## Zero applies to:

- All learner drivers.
- All Provisional 1 drivers.
- All Provisional 2 drivers.

## 0.02 applies to:

- Drivers of vehicles of 'gross vehicle mass' greater than 13.9 tonnes.
- Drivers of vehicles carrying dangerous goods.
- Drivers of public vehicles such as taxi or bus drivers.

## 0.05 applies to:

- All other licences not subject to a 0.02 or zero limit.

# Staying under the limit

Estimating your BAC is often inaccurate because:

- The alcohol concentration of drinks vary from 2.5 percent (eg light beer) to over 40 percent (eg vodka, whisky).
- Beer may be served in pints, schooners or middies.
- Wine glasses may vary in size from 100 to 280mls. Many other drinks come in non-standard sizes.
- Factors such as your gender, size, weight fitness, health and liver function will all affect your BAC. Also, the rate at which alcohol is eliminated from your system varies from person to person.

So, don't try to estimate your BAC. **Measure it.** The RTA recommends using an Australian Standards approved (AS – 3547) breath testing device. But remember:

- Alcohol must not be consumed for at least 10 minutes before testing because alcohol in your mouth will give an artificially high reading.
- Your BAC will rise for up to 2 hours after you stop drinking.
- If you go out drinking and have a big night you may still be over the limit the next day so you may need to take another test in the morning.

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## Getting home safely

If you are planning to drink, then plan NOT to drive. Plan ahead and arrange overnight accommodation or alternative transport:

- Share a taxi with friends.
- Catch public transport.
- Ride with a driver who hasn't been drinking or taking drugs.
- Arrange for a friend or relative to give you a lift.



For more information about alcohol and other drugs and their affect on driving visit the RTA website [www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)



For further enquiries:



[www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)



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Roads and Traffic Authority

April 05

Stock no. 4732 RTA/Pub. 05.050