

Substance-Impaired Driving

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 27 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies, including education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. This brief includes data for the 23 4-year institutions in the coalition; 2-year campuses participate in a separate version of the survey, and their data is not included in this statewide aggregate. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will focus on data related to impaired driving data collected from the 2025 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (sample size, N = 5634).

Background

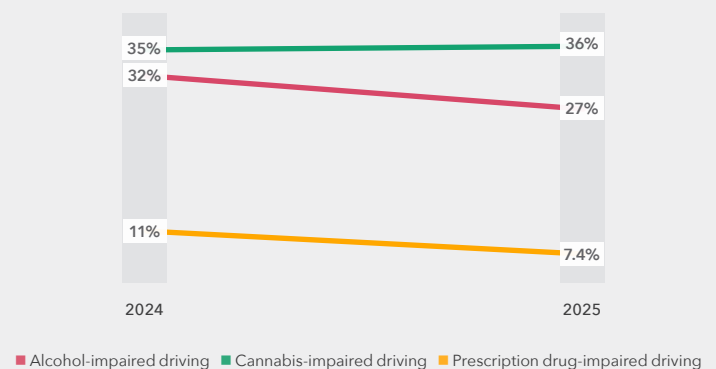
Alcohol and drug impairment are factors that can increase the likelihood of automobile injuries. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), approximately 1,500 college students ages 18-24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes, each year.¹ In 2024, 143 people were killed in traffic crashes involving a substance impaired driver in Missouri. Approximately 20% of those drivers were aged 20-29, and 10% were aged 10-19.² Additionally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, (NHTSA), reports that 30% of fatal traffic crashes involved alcohol-impaired driving.⁴

Missouri Data

In 2025, 60% of Missouri college students report using alcohol, 33% report using cannabis and 5.4% report prescription drug misuse (either use without a doctor's prescription, or misuse of their own

prescription) in the past year. The MACHB also asks students to report if they have driven within 2 hours after consuming alcohol, after misusing prescription drugs, or after smoking cannabis at any point in the past 12 months. Trend data for each of those impaired driving behaviors among students who have used in the past year are listed in chart 1.

Chart 1: Impaired Driving Trend Data



The data in chart one shows that the percentage of students who report driving after using cannabis is

higher than the percentage of students who drove after using alcohol or who drove after misusing prescription drugs. This is an important distinction because it shows that many young adults likely don't perceive driving 'high' as negatively as they'd perceive driving drunk. The Colorado Department of Transportation recommends waiting six or more hours after smoking marijuana, and eight or more hours after consuming marijuana before operating a motor vehicle.³ Implementing educational materials about driving after using cannabis is increasingly important with the passage of Amendment 3 which legalized adult cannabis use in Missouri. Additionally, while not all prescription drugs impair, the main categories asked about on the MACHB (stimulants, pain medications, benzodiazepines, and sleeping medications) are all drug categories that can impair and impact cognition and reaction time. Given that students are asked to report if they have driven after drug misuse (i.e., using without a valid prescription or misuse of their own medication), it is possible that their ability to drive was impaired.

Demographics of Students Who Drive Impaired

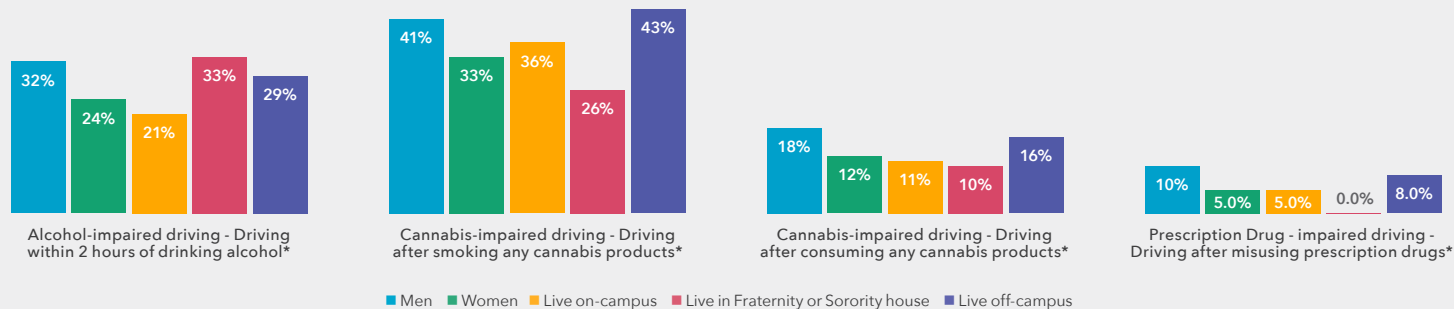
Rates of impaired driving among various demographics of students are shown in chart 2. Overall, the number of students who reported driving impaired decreased from 2024 to 2025, however the slight increase in cannabis-impaired driving brings attention to potential harm reduction strategies. Previously, the data showed that the highest rates of impaired driving

occurred after alcohol usage, but this year, the data reflects that alcohol and prescription drug rates have slowly decreased while cannabis rates have remained high. The 2025 MACHB collected data on cannabis impaired driving after smoking cannabis versus after consuming cannabis products. There is a higher rate of students that are driving after smoking cannabis than after consuming (i.e edibles). This could mean that students prefer smoking as their medium when using cannabis, which can direct prevention efforts. The data also shows that students who live off campus have driven impaired from alcohol more often than students that live on campus, which is not surprising as students who live off campus live further from most common drinking spots (tailgates, Greek life parties, local bars). Lastly, it is important to note that the sample size was too small for those who live in a Fraternity and Sorority Life facility to report whether they drove after misusing prescription drugs.

Use of Designated Drivers (DDs)

More than two-thirds (66%) of Missouri college students report using a designated driver at least half the time that they needed one after drinking. It is important to note that 23% of students reported that they did not need a designated driver because they either walked or stayed where they were drinking. The percentage of students who reported never using a DD has stayed the same at a very low percentage. With the steady rate of cannabis-impaired driving, campuses may increase impaired driving prevention programming related to non-alcoholic substances among students. Shown in

Chart 2: Impaired Driving by Demographics



*Anytime in the last 12 months

Table 1 is data regarding how often students used a designated driver from 2024 to 2025.

Table 1: Designated Drivers

In the 12 months, how often have you used a designated driver (or DD, defined as someone who had no alcoholic drinks) when you drank and needed a ride home?	2024	2025
100% (Always)	47%	46%
51-99% (More than half the time I drank)	16%	15%
50% (About half of the time I drank)	3.9%	4.4%
1-49% (Less than half of the time I drank)	3.2%	7.6%
No, I have never needed a DD because I walked or stayed where I was drinking	22%	23%
No, I don't use a DD	4.0%	4.0%

Additionally, 91% of Missouri college students correctly identified a designated driver as someone who has not consumed any alcohol, and 50% have reported being the designated driver at least once in the past year.

Summary

While rates of driving after using impairing substances have increased in some areas this year, the number of students using these substances has decreased, or remained steady, with a significant number of students (39%) noting that they are actively considering or trying to change their drug or alcohol use. These positive changes could lead to positive changes in driving behavior related to substances as well. Cannabis usage and related impairment are not as easily quantifiable as alcohol (i.e. the body processes approximately one standard alcohol drink per hour), but the current recommendation is to wait 5-6 hours after consuming cannabis before driving. More education is needed with students on waiting a significant amount of time before driving after using cannabis. Similarly, as almost 1 in 4 students who drink report driving within 2 hours of consuming alcohol, messaging and education should focus on waiting until one's BAC (blood alcohol content) has reached

zero and that students cannot gauge their level of impairment without knowing their BAC.

Prevention Initiatives

Institutions of higher education in Missouri have worked to prevent impaired driving using statewide initiatives funded by the Missouri Department of Transportation delivered through Partners in Prevention.

CHEERS

CHEERS is a statewide program that works with bars, restaurants, and nightclubs to provide free non-alcoholic drinks to designated drivers. CHEERS also promotes messages on social media and on campuses to promote using sober designated drivers. Learn more at [CHEERS to the Designated Driver!](#)

Drive Safe Drive Smart

Drive Safe Drive Smart (DSDS) is an educational program working to promote safe driving behaviors and reduce impaired driving among college students in Missouri. Drive Safe Drive Smart provides resources and materials to campuses including brochures and handouts, social media, and more to assist in messaging and education. DSDS also promotes billboards in communities throughout the state. Learn more at [Drive Safe Drive Smart](#).

Party Safe

Party Safe is a free, online training for college students to learn about hosting safe and responsible parties and events. The training focuses on general party planning, alcohol and host responsibilities, and dealing with issues that arise. Learn more and [take the Party Safe training here](#).

SMART

The State of Missouri Alcohol Responsibility Training (SMART) program is a free, online training for people who sell or serve alcohol in the state of Missouri. The training focuses on recognition of fake ID's, acceptable forms of identification, preventing service to minors and intoxicated individuals, and more. Learn more at [SMART](#) or [take the SMART training here](#).

For more information about Partners in Prevention and to explore our research, visit mopip.org/pip/research.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

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References

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2023, July). Harmful and underage college drinking. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Retrieved from <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/college-drinking#:~:text=The%20most%20recent%20statistics%20from,injuries%2C%20including%20motor%20vehicle%20crashes>.

2. Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety. (2024, December 31). Emphasis Area 4: Impaired Driving. Retrieved from Emphasis Area 4: Impaired Driving | Missouri Department of Transportation on 2025, August 8.

3. Colorado Department of Transportation. (2022). How long should I wait to drive after getting high. State of Colorado. Retrieved from <https://www.codot.gov/safety/impaired-driving/druggeddriving/campaign-news/how-long-should-i-wait-to-drive-after-getting-high>

4. NHTSA. (2025). Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2023. Retrieved from Traffic Safety Fact Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2023