

'Alcohol, Drugs and Using the Road'

Drugs Fact Sheet

Introduction

Alcohol is part of our culture and often plays a part in our social lives. Many people drink alcohol on all sorts of occasions for all sorts of reasons. But it is actually a very powerful depressant drug, which acts on all our physical and mental functions. Also, far too many people are killed on our roads as a result of alcohol consumption.

Understanding how alcohol works, the effects it has, and the possible consequences of those effects will help students make informed choices about 'sensible drinking'.

Some Drug Facts

Drugs:

- Can be legal (medicines) and illegal, and include alcohol
- Come in many different categories, such as stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens etc
- Tend to be unpredictable in their effects and length of time they stay in the system
- Can usually only be analysed in blood, saliva, sweat and urine (apart from alcohol which can appear in expired breath)
- If illegal, are classified in law (Class A, B or C) according to their degree of harmfulness or danger, both to the individual and to society, with penalties varying accordingly



How some illegal drugs can affect the ability to cope in the road environment, especially driving?

- **Steroids** – increase aggressive behaviour and cause mood swings
- **Ecstasy** – this stimulant drug has hallucinogenic properties; sounds, colour and emotions can seem much more intense; can distort vision and affect concentration; can leave users feeling very fatigued and depressed for several days afterwards
- **Amphetamines** – cause the mind to race and users to feel over-confident and energetic; users can become very tense and anxious; can cause panic and hallucinations; leaves users fatigued and depressed for days afterwards
- **Poppers** – give a brief but very intense 'head-rush'; causes headaches, feeling faint and nausea
- **Cannabis** – impairs concentration, reaction times and co-ordination; can induce feelings of anxiety, paranoia, apathy, drowsiness and disorientation

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- o **Cocaine and Crack** – a stimulant drug that induces feelings of over-confidence and sometimes aggression; affects judgement of speed and distance; increases risk-taking; leaves users feeling tired and depressed for days afterwards
- o **LSD** – causes 'trips' which can be good or bad; sense of movement and time may speed up or slow down; objects, colours and sounds may be distorted; users may react to objects or sounds that aren't even there, placing themselves and other road users in danger; can cause 'flashbacks' where parts of a trip are re-lived a long time after the event
- o **Gases, glues and aerosols** – cause effects like being very drunk; may cause hallucinations; all senses can be affected; can induce nausea, vomiting, black-outs and respiratory failure
- o **GHB** – a strong sedative, used in the medical world as an anaesthetic; causes uncoordinated movement, slurred speech, blackouts, memory loss; headache and agitation as effects wear off
- o **Ketamine** – hallucinogenic, giving the user an 'out-of-body' experience; elevates pain threshold so don't feel pain; can cause panic attacks, and depression; causes breathing difficulties, can cause heart failure
- o **Heroin/Opiates** – very addictive, leads to slower reaction times, lethargy, fatigue and impaired concentration and co-ordination
- o **Khat** – a stimulant; can cause anxiety, irritability, aggression and in some cases out-of-character violence
- o **Tranquillisers** – slow mental processes including analysis of a situation and reaction times; cause drowsiness and may lead to forgetfulness; can be extremely dangerous if mixed with alcohol

