



Alcohol and drugs

We all know driving a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs is dangerous, but how do these substances affect your driving and what do you need to know as a motorist?

From 2014 to 2018, 36% of drivers and motorcyclists killed in crashes had an illegal blood alcohol concentration and/or drugs in their system.

This means excessive alcohol consumption or drug use was a factor in around 170 deaths on South Australian roads during those years.

The presence of alcohol or drugs in the body can impair vital senses including vision and hearing. It can slow the brain's information processing speed, resulting in reduced coordination and slow reaction times, even when performing basic driving manoeuvres. A driver can also experience an exaggerated sense of confidence.

What is blood alcohol concentration (BAC)?

BAC is the amount of alcohol in your body, measured as grams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood.

What is a legal BAC?

In South Australia, it's an offence for a fully licenced driver to operate a vehicle if their BAC is 0.05 grams or more.

The 0.05 limit also applies to the qualified supervising driver for a learner driver (at any time) and to the qualified supervising driver for a P1 provisional driver (between midnight and 5am).

Some drivers must have a zero BAC, including learner drivers, provisional licence holders, heavy vehicle drivers, as well as bus and taxi drivers.

Is a small amount of alcohol safe?

Although it's legal to drive with a BAC below 0.05, it's important to know that even the smallest amount of alcohol can affect your driving ability and increase your chances of being involved in a crash (mix alcohol and drugs and the affects can be even worse).

If you plan to drive, it's safest not to drink any alcohol at all.

Even if you're below the BAC limit, you must have proper control of your vehicle. If you're affected by alcohol, you may be in breach of section 97 of the Australian Road Rules, which states that "a driver must not drive a vehicle unless the driver has proper control of the vehicle."

Staying below 0.05

The only way to be sure you're under the limit is to avoid alcohol altogether.

There's no reliable way of knowing how many drinks will put you over 0.05, due to other influencing factors, including age, weight, gender, the last time you ate and the condition of your liver.

A properly calibrated, Standards Australia-certified breath alcohol testing device can show your BAC at the time of testing, but your level could rise once you start driving.

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink contains about 10 grams of alcohol.

One standard drink:

Wine 100 mL 13% alc/vol	Sparkling wine 100 mL 13% alc/vol	Fortified wine 60 mL 20% alc/vol
Light beer 425 mL 2.7% alc/vol	Regular beer 285 mL 4.9% alc/vol	Spirits 30 mL 40% alc/vol

The labels on alcoholic drinks show the number of standard drinks they hold.

Many alcoholic drinks served at bars and restaurants contain more than one standard drink.

Reducing your BAC

Your BAC will peak between 20 minutes and two hours after you've finished your last alcoholic drink.

After a night of heavy drinking, you could still be over the legal limit the following morning.

Alcohol is removed from your body through the liver, which takes about an hour to process one standard drink. The only thing that can reduce your BAC is time – drinking coffee, a cold shower, fresh air, eating, exercise, and any other methods simply don't work.

If you plan to drink, it's best to leave your car, motorcycle or bicycle at home and use alternative transport – or one of your group can agree to be the designated driver and not drink.

What's the legal limit for a prescribed drug in a driver's system?

'Prescribed' is a legal term for the drugs mentioned below and doesn't mean prescription drugs.

Any amount of a prescribed drug in a driver's system is illegal and can be detected during a roadside test.

This includes THC (the active component in cannabis), methylamphetamine (speed, ice or crystal meth) and MDMA (ecstasy). Traces of these drugs can stay in a person's system for more than 24 hours after they've been taken.

What are the penalties for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol?

Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol recklessly risks the lives of the driver, their passengers and other road users.

Court-imposed penalties vary from time to time, but as at February 2020, the following applies:

- The penalty for a first drink-driving offence, where the BAC is less than 0.08 (low range) is a \$743 fine, a \$60 Victims of Crime Levy and four demerit points.
- If this is unsuccessfully challenged in court, the minimum penalty is \$1,100, mandatory licence disqualification for at least three months and six demerit points.
- On-the-spot licence disqualifications and larger court-imposed penalties apply for more serious and repeat offences.
- A first offence for drug-driving will result in a court-imposed fine between \$900 and \$1,300, a minimum six-month licence disqualification and six demerit points.

We're here to help

Call RAA's road safety team on **8202 4570**, email **motoringroadrules@raa.com.au** or visit **raa.com.au/roadsafety**