

THE PROBLEMS WITH MARIJUANA AND DRIVING: MEDICAL, LEGAL, AND PUBLIC HEALTH PERSPECTIVES

Moderator

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Background and Purpose

Massachusetts recently joined the small but growing number of states in which marijuana use is legal for recreational use by adults over age 21 years. A key area of concern related to this policy change is the potential impact on motor vehicle crashes (MVCs). Cannabinoids are psychoactive chemicals found in marijuana; Δ -9-Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the principal compound that has been studied, and is associated with psychomotor impairment that can impact driving ability. Colorado and Washington State, the first two states to legalize marijuana for recreational use, have seen post-legalization increases in the prevalence of THC exposure among drivers involved in fatal crashes. However, there are significant limitations to existing data on driver culpability after marijuana use in MVCs. Many questions remain about the impact of legalization policies on MVCs and what can be done to prevent marijuana-impaired driving.

The purpose of this symposium is to bring together experts in medical toxicology, public health policy, and law to discuss this issue of growing importance. Panelists will describe the impacts of THC on driving skills and the state of the science on measurement of marijuana in the context of driving impairment. We will describe what is known about marijuana-related MVC risk, epidemiological trends in marijuana-impaired driving, and risk factors for this behavior. We will discuss current laws and law enforcement practices pertaining to detecting and deterring marijuana-impaired driving. This multi-disciplinary panel will discuss future directions needed for research in this area with the intent of sparking research collaboration across the UMass system and with public partners.

Anticipated Format

Four, 15-minute presentations with 15 minutes for audience questions and answers at the end.