

Marijuana and Driving:

A Look at Texans' Attitudes and Impact on Driving Under the Influence



Marijuana is the most commonly detected drug besides alcohol in drivers (*Adrian, 2015; Hartman & Huestis, 2013; Otto et al., 2016*). The most recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) National Roadside Survey of Alcohol and Drug Use by Drivers shows the use of alcohol before driving is decreasing, while use of other drugs, including marijuana, before driving is increasing (*Berning et al., 2015*).

Currently, there are eight states and Washington, D.C. that have legalized medical and recreational use of marijuana, four states who have decriminalized possession, and twenty states that have legalized medicinal use (*NORML, 2017*).

In 2017, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) surveyed 438 Texas residents in 25 counties to gauge the perceptions of licensed drivers regarding marijuana use, legalization, and driving. This effort attempts to inform traffic safety stakeholders by examining marijuana use and attitudes through the lens of improved traffic safety as a major outcome.

Regarding attitudes and beliefs toward marijuana and driving, researchers found:



66% agreed it is unsafe to drive after using marijuana



38% agreed with the statement that it was unsafe to drive within two hours of using marijuana



55.3% agreed that drivers who use marijuana are more likely to be involved in a crash than drivers who don't



68.5%
do not feel safe

riding in a car with a driver who used marijuana before driving



21.5%
feel safe



70.1% agreed it is unsafe to drive under the influence of marijuana

Regarding attitudes and beliefs toward marijuana, alcohol and driving, researchers found:

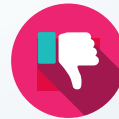


89.5% felt it was unsafe to drive after consuming alcohol



39.5%
agreed

driving under the influence of marijuana is safer than driving under the influence of alcohol



34%
disagreed

In regards to punishment, drivers under the influence of marijuana should be penalized at the same level as drivers under the influence of alcohol



92.7% felt it is unsafe to drive after using alcohol and marijuana in combination



39% agreed that drivers under the influence of marijuana are less likely to get into a crash than drivers under the influence of alcohol, whereas **36.8%** disagreed with the statement

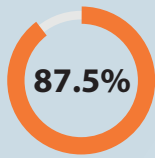


65.1%
agreed

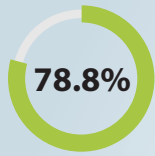


29.2%
disagreed

Regarding attitudes and beliefs toward legalization of marijuana, researchers found:



agreed that Texas should legalize marijuana for serious medical conditions (e.g., epilepsy, cancer)



in favor of legalizing marijuana for medical conditions such as arthritis, migraines, or any other illness for which marijuana provides relief

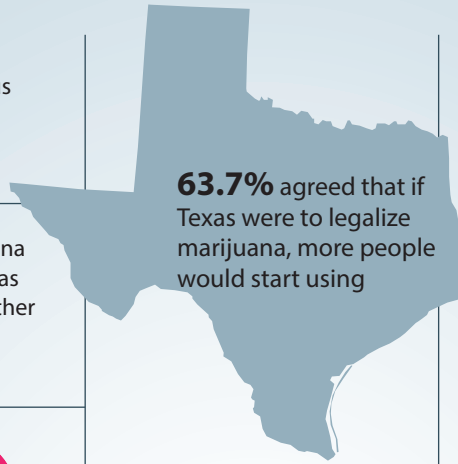


legalization for recreational purposes

42.9%
agreed



45.7%
disagreed



80.4% of respondents agreed a per se blood concentration level for marijuana, similar to alcohol, should be established if marijuana were legal



60.3% of respondents also agreed that if marijuana were legal, drivers under the influence of marijuana should be arrested



62.6% of respondents agreed if made legal more people would be willing to drive under the influence of marijuana

The TTI survey findings are similar to other marijuana surveys in the United States, including the Marist College/Yahoo News Survey and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). The Marist Poll is representative of each region in the United States, and pollsters interviewed 1,122 adults in the United States (*Marist College, 2017*). The NSDUH is an annual survey of approximately 70,000 individuals aged 12 years and older in the United States (*NSDUH, 2017*). The NSDUH provides national and state-level estimates on tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use (*NSDUH, 2017*).

The TTI survey results suggest that males were more likely to use marijuana compared to females. In the past 12 months, 14.3 percent of males and 11.8 percent of females reported use. Similarly, in the past 30 days, 8.0 percent of males and 5.9 percent of females reported use. The Marist College Poll found that, of those reporting marijuana use, 55 percent were male and 45 percent were female (*Marist College, 2017*). However, the National Institute of Drug Abuse has found that marijuana use is more common in females than males (*NIH, 2017*).

The Marist Poll found that, of national adults, 18 percent believed marijuana has more of a health risk compared to tobacco use (*Marist College, 2017*). The TTI survey findings agree with the Marist study in that 25.6 percent of respondents agreed that marijuana is less safe to use than tobacco. In regards to

alcohol, the Marist Poll found that 18 percent of adults believed marijuana was more of a health risk compared to alcohol (*Marist College, 2017*). The TTI survey results are consistent with the Marist study, which found that 20.8 percent of respondents agreed that marijuana is less safe to use than alcohol.

NSDUH reported that 19.8 percent of adults aged 18 to 25 years old and 6.5 percent of adults older than 26 years old reported using marijuana in the past month (*Bose et al., 2015*). The TTI survey results are consistent with the NSDUH survey, which found that 20.5 percent of those aged 18 to 24 years old reported marijuana use in the past 30 days, whereas 5.8 percent of those aged 25 years and older reported marijuana use in the past 30 days. The Marist Poll's results on marijuana use identified that a majority of individuals using marijuana are millennials, do not have a college degree, and characterize themselves as liberal (*Marist College, 2017*)—all of which is consistent with the findings of the TTI survey.

The amount of refusals or missing answers to questions related to marijuana use in the past 12 months and past 30 days was alarming but is consistent with results from other surveys. Specifically, the Marist College poll found that 40 to 45 percent of marijuana users hide their use in the United States (*Marist College, 2017*).

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