

Drug driving fact sheet

During 2006, alcohol and other drug use were identified as a contributing factor in 106 fatalities within Queensland, representing 31.6% of the Queensland road toll.

To combat these statistics, the Queensland Government passed legislation to enable police to undertake random roadside saliva testing for illegal drugs from December 2007.

Random roadside drug testing

What drugs will be tested?

Police will ask you to provide a saliva sample for the purpose of testing for:

- THC—the active ingredient in cannabis
- Methylamphetamine—also known as speed and ice
- MDMA—the active ingredient in ecstasy.

Saliva tests will only be able to detect the active ingredients of the nominated drugs THC, MDMA and methylamphetamine.

Even though methamphetamine is manufactured from substances such as pseudoephedrine (found in cold and flu tablets) those substances will not be detected by the saliva tests.

How will saliva based roadside drug driving testing work?

Roadside drug testing allows police to conduct saliva testing in conjunction with random breath testing (RBT) or as a stand alone check. The roadside drug testing process operates in a similar way to RBTs.

What is the testing process?

You will undergo a simple and painless preliminary saliva test (screening test) which will take three to five minutes. If a negative result is returned you will be free to go. If a positive result (drug detected) is returned you will be taken to a police vehicle for a second saliva test.

If the second saliva test is positive for drugs, your driver licence will be suspended for 24 hours and the remainder of the saliva sample will be sent for laboratory analysis.

Following a positive laboratory result, motorists will be notified and charged with a traffic offence for drug driving.

If you are unable to provide a saliva sample you will be required to provide a specimen of blood for analysis.

What level of drugs can be detected without penalty?

There will be zero tolerance. Any trace of the nominated drugs in your system and you can be penalised.

What are the penalties?

Any trace of illegal drugs in your system and the court may impose a fine of up to \$1,050 and you could lose your licence for up to nine months for a first offence.

If you are found drug driving a second time while an outstanding drug driving offence is still to be heard by a court, you will have your driver licence suspended until the matter is heard or finalised by a court.

Can a saliva sample be used for other purposes?

No. Saliva samples obtained from a roadside drug test can only be used to detect drug driving and will only result in a traffic offence if a positive result is returned.

All saliva specimens obtained from roadside drug testing will be destroyed once they are no longer required.

Who will conduct the test?

Police officers who are trained and authorised to operate the testing devices will conduct roadside drug testing.

How long after consuming illegal drugs can they be detected?

The saliva tests are designed to only react with the active ingredient of the relevant drug.

The detection period for the active ingredient in the relevant drug varies depending on factors such as the quantity and quality of the drug that has been ingested, the frequency of use of the drug and the period of time since taking the drug.

Prescription and other drugs

Driving under the influence of drugs

If a police officer reasonably suspects that your driving ability has been impaired by any drug you may be required to provide a specimen of blood for analysis.

If you fail to provide a specimen as required, or a drug is detected in your blood, you will be charged and required to appear in court. If convicted you could be disqualified from holding or obtaining a driver licence for a period of time. You may also be fined and face jail time.

What are the different types of drugs?

The following is an outline of drug families and their common medication names.

Central nervous system (CNS) stimulants

Stimulants or "uppers" speed up your brain and body. Common stimulants include:

- amphetamines
- slimming pills
- some cold and flu medication and decongestants which contain substances such as pseudoephedrine (eg. Sudafed, Benadryl, Codral, Tylenol Cold and Flu)
- illegal drugs (eg. speed, ecstasy, and cocaine).

Central nervous system (CNS) depressants

Depressants or "downers" slow down your brain and body. Common depressants include:

- pain killers containing codeine based preparations (eg. Panadeine, Codalgin, DymadonCo, Digesic, Capadex, Paradex, Nurofen Plus, Mersyndol, and Aspalgin)
- cough mixtures (eg. Benadryl Original)
- allergy medications (eg. Actifed, Polaramine, and Avil, Phenergan, and Dilosyn)
- benzodiazepines (eg. Valium, Rohypnol, Serapax, Rivotril, Mogadon, Alepam, Alodorm, Antenex, Ducene, Normison, and Temaze)
- antidepressants (eg. Tryptanol, Prothiaden, Tofranil, Dothep, Endep, Moclobemide, and Sertraline)
- antihistamines (eg. Polaramine, Avil, and Actifed)
- barbiturates (eg. Phenobarbitone)

- sedatives and tranquillizers (eg. Largactil, Melleril, Risperdal, Stelazine).

Narcotic analgesics

- opiates (morphine, codeine, and oxycodone)
- methadone
- pethidine
- illegal drugs (eg. heroin).

Other drugs

- illegal drugs (eg. cannabis, marijuana, hashish and hashish oil; and hallucinogens- LSD, mushrooms)
- solvents (sniffing glue, paints, and aerosols)
- inhalants
- high dose corticosteroids (eg. Prednisone, Prednisolone, Cortate, Dexamethasone)
- antihypertensives (beta blockers eg. Betaloc, Minax, Tenormin, Noten, Inderal, Deralin, and Dilatrend)
- interferon (eg. Betaferon)
- some herbal medicines (eg. Valerian, Passionflower, Sleep Ezy)
- alcohol.

How can these drugs affect my driving?

The effects of drugs on driving vary depending on the type of drug. Common effects of drugs on driving are:

- inability to judge distance and speed
- distortions of time, place and space
- reduced coordination
- hyperactivity
- aggressiveness
- paranoid psychosis
- hallucinations
- blurred vision
- convulsions
- dizziness and fainting
- fatigue
- memory loss
- nausea
- tremors
- unpredictable moods/behaviours
- unconsciousness
- muscle weakness.

Safety tips

Mixing drugs with other drugs or alcohol can seriously affect your health and your ability to drive safely. You may not feel intoxicated, when in fact you could be over the limit.

- Never drive after taking illegal drugs.
- Never drive after taking prescribed or over-the-counter medications that could affect your driving.
- If you take a prescription or illegal drug and you are unsure of the effect of that drug on your ability to drive, don't drive, use public transport, ask someone else to drive or catch a taxi.

Get the right advice

You should always check with your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to mix your medications or to drink alcohol while on your medication and how the prescription drugs you are taking can affect your driving. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for safe alternatives.

Always follow the recommended dose, read the information provided on the container or information provided with your medication, and never take someone else's medication. Look out for warning messages.

More information

For confidential help and/or information contact the Alcohol and Drug Information Service on (07) 3837 5989 (all hours) or 1800 177 833 (toll free).

The statements contained in this fact sheet are for information purposes only and should not be used for any other purpose.