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New Program to Address Impaired Driving from Alcohol, Cannabis and Prescription Drugs

Educational classes and resources offered to adults and adolescents

Researchers at University of California San Diego School of Medicine will expand a statewide program to prevent driving under the influence of alcohol, cannabis and prescription drugs. With funding from the California Office of Traffic Safety through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the UC San Diego Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety Program (TREDS) provides education and resources to teach the public about the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs in an effort to keep our roadways safe.



Linda Hill, MD, MPH, program director of TREDS and professor of family medicine and public health at UC San Diego School of Medicine.

In addition to alcohol, driving under the influence of cannabis and the misuse of prescription or over-the-counter medications has rapidly become a serious traffic safety issue in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 13 percent of nighttime weekend drivers have marijuana in their system and 24 percent of Americans used more than three prescription drugs in the last 30 days.

“Collisions due to driving under the influence are 100 percent preventable. Our behavior behind-the-wheel profoundly influences our crash risk,” said Linda Hill, MD, MPH, program director of TREDS and professor of family medicine and public health at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “With the legalization of marijuana, there are more drivers getting behind-the-wheel with THC in their system. We can reduce this risk by providing intervention strategies.”

TREDS conducts workshops to prepare law enforcement and health professionals to teach classes to the public. The two new programs aimed to reduce the risks of driving impaired are:

- Steer Clear: Decide to Drive Sober – for ages 15-20

- Higher Education: Driving High is DUI – for the general adult population

Topics include:

- Effects of cannabis use
- Misconceptions about cannabis and driving
- Consequences of a cannabis-DUI
- Strategies to prevent impaired driving

“Participants will learn a variety of facts, including how driving under the influence slows reaction time, decreases coordination and impairs judgement,” said Hill. “Our collaboration with law enforcement agencies, health care providers, transportation experts and the public gives us the opportunity to expand our services and reach to reverse trends and prevent tragedies.”

To drive home the life-saving messages, TREDs has partnered with the [California Highway Patrol \(CHP\)](#).

“DUI doesn’t just mean booze,” said Sergeant Glen Glaser, Jr. with CHP. “We have heard from drivers who were under the influence of drugs that they drive better when they are high or that they didn’t think police could tell they were driving high. My response is, no, you can’t, and yes, we can.”

Glaser adds that today’s cannabis effects everyone different. “It’s not like it was 25 or 30 years ago. THC is three times stronger than it was in the 90’s. It can make you feel like you are on a stimulant, a depressant or even cause hallucinations.”

The peak effect for smoking THC is approximately 10 minutes after inhaling and could last up to four hours. For edibles, the peak effect occurs up to two hours after ingesting and could last up to 10 hours. Impairing effects are based on the strength of THC, personal tolerance and mode of use.

“Along with our standardized field sobriety testing, law enforcement is currently researching new testing to remove impaired drivers from our streets,” said Glaser. “Our main message is: don’t get behind the wheel while under the influence. Plan ahead, ride share or phone a friend. Don’t become one of our statistics.”

Along with the new classes, TREDs will continue to train health professionals and law enforcement on safety for senior drivers and deliver education on distracted driving and pedestrian safety, as well as free train-the-trainer programs to law enforcement and public

health professionals.

For more information or to request a training, contact TREDs at 858-534-8386 or treds@ucsd.edu.

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