

# Driving: Marijuana Signs & Symptoms

## Mental v. Physical Impairment



**MARIJUANA** tends to stay in the brain (mental impairment is primary)

**ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS** (generally) include more obvious physical impairment

A person impaired by marijuana won't exhibit the same signs as a person "drunk" on alcohol, but both are "impaired."

**Marijuana Potency** has risen from less than 4% in 1984, to over 10% in 2008, and is routinely **over 30% in 2013** for marijuana, and up to 98% being reported for hash oils.

Experts differ on estimated timelines: many factors, including frequency of use, dose, potency, method of ingestion and gender, may influence the duration of effects.

THC and similar compounds bind with receptors (CB<sup>1</sup> and CB<sup>2</sup>) in the brain and other parts of the body affecting the function of the hippocampus (short-term memory), cerebellum (coordination) and basal ganglia (unconscious muscle movements).

- **Oral or edible ingestion** is generally a longer, lower and slower high than smoked.
- **Smoked THC** is generally below 5 ng/mL in the blood from 60 minutes to an outside of 3 hours from the last "smoking event." This doesn't mean it has left the user's system and/or is no longer impairing them. It simply means that it is being processed by the user's body, and is no longer in high concentrations in the person's blood (which is the fluid that is collected as evidence and tested) because it has bonded to the various receptors in the body, causing impairment.
- **Chronic Users** fear that they will always "test positive" for marijuana in their system and be subjected to arrest. Reality: the substance that remains in the blood particularly of chronic users is the inactive metabolite, carboxy-THC, which does not factor into the "per se" level for WA drivers. Officers are looking for articulable "impairment," not merely use.
- **Per Se versus Affected By:** Drivers in Washington can be convicted of DUI under either of two elements: either by exceeding the "per se" levels of .08 alcohol or 5 nanograms marijuana, or by being "affected by" alcohol and/or any drug. Many users will be "affected by" alcohol or marijuana at well below the "per se" level.

|             | Peak                | Duration         | Dissipates from Blood | Residual Effects      |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Smoked      | <b>0-30 minutes</b> | <b>1-2 hours</b> | <b>3-6 hours</b>      | <b>Up to 24 hours</b> |
| Oral/Edible | <b>2-3 hours</b>    | <b>2-3 hours</b> | <b>3-6 hours</b>      | <b>Up to 24 hours</b> |

## COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS of MARIJUANA:

- Relaxation
- Euphoria
- Relaxed Inhibitions
- Disorientation
- Altered time & distance perception
- Lack of concentration
- Impaired memory & comprehension
- Jumbled thought formation
- Drowsiness
- Mood changes, including panic and paranoia with high dose
- Body tremors (major muscle groups: quads, glutes and abs)
- Eyelid tremors (Modified Romberg Balance or anytime eyes are closed)
- Reddened conjunctiva (whites of the eyes turn pinkish from smoked marijuana)
- Flecks of green veg. matter in teeth
- Possible coating on tongue
- Dilated pupil
- Heightened Senses

Created by the WA State Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor Program by Courtney Popp and Mark Crandall, WA State Patrol Impaired Driving Section, under a grant provided by the WA Traffic Safety Commission. For training or resource information, please contact [Courtney.popp@kinacountv.gov](mailto:Courtney.popp@kinacountv.gov)