

ThinkFirst Reminds us to Stay Safe this St. Patrick's Day: Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving.

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For decades, Americans have come together to celebrate their Irish heritage (Irish or not) over green beer and community festivities. Sadly, all this merry-making can lead to dangerous driving conditions as party-goers head home. The selfish act of drinking and driving can rip people from their friends and loved ones forever. In 2017 alone, 59 people were killed in drunk-driving crashes in the U.S. over the St. Patrick's Day holiday (6 p.m. March 16th to 5:59 a.m. March 18th). The ThinkFirst National Injury Prevention Foundation (ThinkFirst) is working to spread the message about the dangers of drunk driving. Even one drink can be one too many. If you're heading out for the Irish festivities, plan ahead and remember: Buzzed Driving Is Drunk Driving.

Tragically, March 17th has become a dangerous holiday on our nation's roads. According to the Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), during the 2017 St. Patrick's Day holiday period, nationally:

- More than one-third (37%) of all motor vehicle crash fatalities involved drunk drivers, with the early hours of March 18th being the most dangerous: between midnight and 5:59 a.m., three-fourths (75%) of all crash fatalities involved drunk drivers.
- From 2013 to 2017, over one-third (35%) of the drunk-driving fatalities during this holiday period involved drivers who had blood alcohol concentrations well above the .08 limit, with 234 drunk-driving fatalities total.
- Drivers should also keep an eye out for pedestrians who have had too much to drink. Walking while intoxicated can also be deadly, as lack of attention to their surroundings could put pedestrians at risk of getting hit by a vehicle.

Drunk driving isn't the only risk: Drug-impaired driving is also an increasing problem on our nation's roads. If drivers are impaired by any substance—alcohol or drugs—they should not get behind the wheel. Driving while impaired is illegal, period. The bottom line is this: If You Feel Different, You Drive Different. It's that simple. Drinking and driving should never be combined. It's essential to plan a sober ride in advance if the holiday celebration will include alcohol. The alternative could change your life, not to mention the lives of your passengers, of pedestrians, or of other drivers and passengers nearby.

“On St. Patrick's Day and every day, if you're going to be driving, plan to stay sober, meaning no alcohol or drugs,” said Debby Gerhardstein, Executive Director of ThinkFirst. “If the situation changes, get a ride with a sober driver. Don't let alcohol or drugs cause you to be a risk to yourself or others on the road; nobody wants to be hit by a drunk driver, and you don't want to be the cause of a fatal crash. Plan ahead -- don't leave it to luck.”

This holiday season, ThinkFirst and NHTSA urge drivers to designate a sober driver before heading out for the evening. If you plan on drinking, plan on not driving:

Party with a Plan

If you plan to drink, plan for a sober driver to take you home. Is it your turn to be the designated driver? Take that role seriously—your friends are relying on you.

- Remember that it is never okay to drink and drive. Even if you've had only one alcoholic beverage, designate a sober driver or plan to use public transportation or a ride service to get home safely.
- Download NHTSA's SaferRide mobile app, available on Google Play for Android devices: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nhtsa.SaferRide&hl=en>, and Apple's iTunes Store for iOS devices: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/saferride/id950774008?mt=8>. SaferRide allows users to call a taxi or a predetermined friend and identifies the user's location so he or she can be picked up.
- Use your community's sober ride program.
- If you see a drunk driver on the road, contact local law enforcement.
- Have a friend who is about to drive after drinking? Take the keys away and decide to get your friend home safely.

About ThinkFirst

ThinkFirst is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to prevent brain, spinal cord and other traumatic injuries through education, research and advocacy. Founded by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, ThinkFirst chapters are based in hospitals and health centers throughout the U.S. and internationally. Chapters provide more than 7,000 presentations annually to schools and community groups promoting safe behaviors to prevent brain, spinal cord and other traumatic injuries, including basic safety, transportation safety and concussion awareness programs for students, falls prevention for older adults, and infant safety for new parents.

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For more information on visit www.thinkfirst.org.

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