

## AlcoholNZ article

### Title

**Injuries and death from traffic crashes with alcohol as a contributing factor**

### At a glance

- This article was published in print form in HPA's June 2017 *AlcoholNZ* magazine (available on [alcohol.org.nz/alcoholnz](http://alcohol.org.nz/alcoholnz)).
- It provides an analysis of Ministry of Transport data of crashes involving drivers under the influence of alcohol, including fatal and injury crashes.
- In 2015, there were 76 fatal crashes and 1,155 injury crashes where driver alcohol was a contributing factor. Overall, 26% of all fatal crashes and 12% of all injury crashes involved driver alcohol.
- Of all drivers involved in fatal crashes, drivers aged 15 to 19 years and 20 to 24 years were the most likely to be affected by alcohol.
- Eighty-five percent of alcohol-affected drivers in fatal crashes were male.
- More recent combined alcohol and drug crash data can be found on [transport.govt.nz](http://transport.govt.nz).

### Citation

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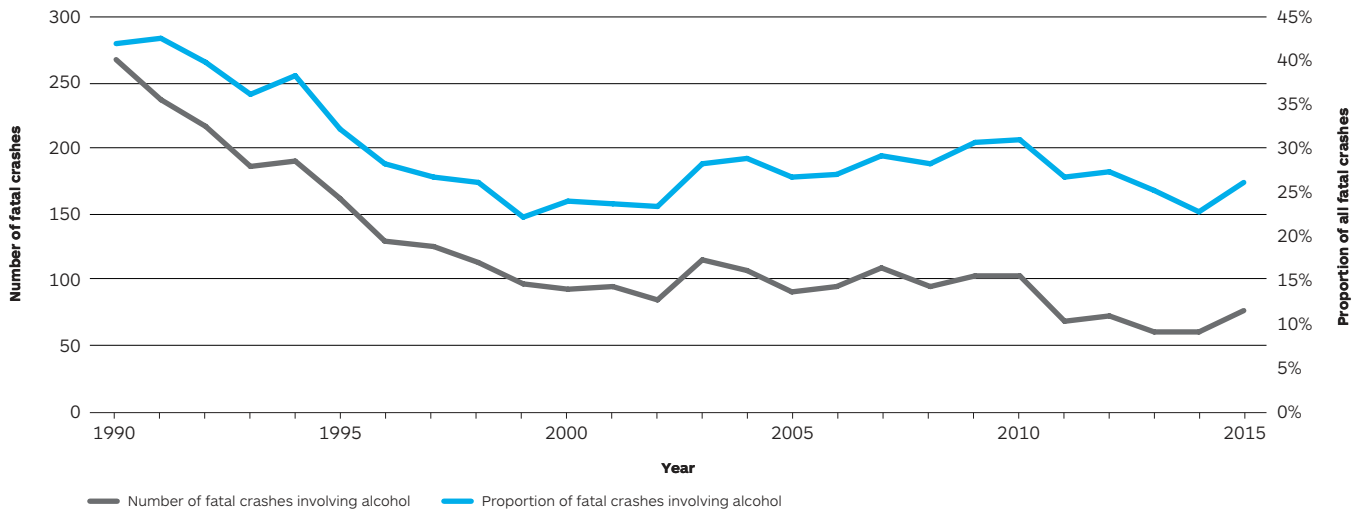
# Injuries and death from traffic crashes with alcohol as a contributing factor

*Road traffic injuries are one of the top five causes of alcohol-attributable deaths in New Zealand. For 15 to 29-year-old men and women, and for 30 to 44-year-old men, road traffic injuries were the first cause of death due to alcohol (Connor, Kydd, Shield, & Rehm, 2013). People with a high blood alcohol level are more likely to be injured or die in a crash than those who are sober. In comparison with sober drivers, the risk of a fatal traffic crash increases exponentially as the level of alcohol consumed by the driver increases (Ministry of Transport, 2016).*

The Land Transport Act 1998 specifies the current legal drink drive limits in New Zealand. For drivers under 20 years of age, the blood alcohol concentration limit is zero. For drivers 20 years and over, the limits are a breath alcohol limit of 250 micrograms (mcg) of alcohol per litre of breath and a blood alcohol concentration limit of 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood.

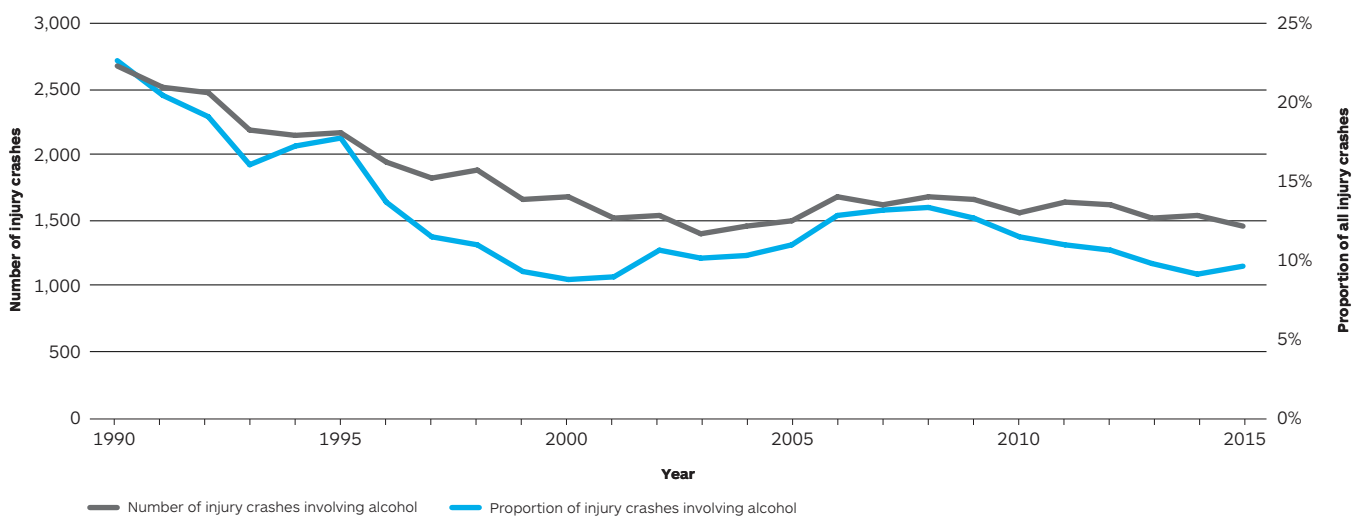
This article uses information sourced from the Ministry of Transport about crashes involving drivers under the influence of alcohol (excluding those only under the influence of other drugs). The Ministry of Transport has published this information, combined with other drugs data, in *Alcohol and Drugs Crash Facts 2016* (Ministry of Transport, 2016).

**Figure 1: Number of fatal crashes involving driver alcohol as a contributing factor, and their proportion of all fatal crashes**



Source: Ministry of Transport.

**Figure 2: Number of injury crashes involving driver alcohol as a contributing factor, and their proportion of all injury crashes**



Source: Ministry of Transport.

## Crashes and casualties with alcohol as a contributing factor

In crash statistics, alcohol is listed as a 'contributing factor' when a driver's blood or breath alcohol is above the legal limit or when the attending officer suspects that alcohol consumption contributed to the crash. Fatal crashes are those crashes that cause injury that results in death within 30 days of the crash. Injury crashes are crashes where no one involved in the crash dies but someone is injured (Ministry of Transport, 2016).

In 2015 there were 76 fatal crashes and 1,155 injury crashes where driver alcohol was a contributing factor. Overall, 26% of all fatal crashes and 12% of all injury crashes involved driver alcohol. From these crashes, there were 78 deaths (25% of all deaths from crashes) and 1,592 injuries (13% of all injuries from crashes).

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the changes between 1990 and 2015 in the number of fatal and injury crashes involving alcohol and these as a proportion of all fatal crashes or injury crashes. The number of deaths (fatalities) and

injuries from crashes with driver alcohol as a contributing factor has decreased over time. The proportion of fatal or injury crashes involving alcohol as a contributing factor has also decreased over time.

## Alcohol-affected drivers and involvement in fatal crashes

Table 1 provides information on the involvement of drivers affected by alcohol in fatal crashes from 2013 to 2015. It shows that, during this period, 26 male drivers aged 15 to 19 years affected by alcohol were involved in fatal crashes and 36% of all 15 to 19-year-old male drivers involved in fatal crashes were affected by alcohol. Of all drivers involved in fatal crashes, drivers aged 15 to 19 years and 20 to 24 years were the most likely to be affected by alcohol. For drivers older than these age groups, the involvement of alcohol as a contributing factor in fatal crashes tended to decrease. Eighty-five percent of alcohol-affected drivers in fatal crashes were male. Out of all drivers involved in fatal crashes, male drivers (18%) were more likely to be affected by alcohol than female drivers (10%).

**Table 1: Drivers affected by alcohol involved in fatal crashes, by age and sex, 2013–2015**

Age	Males		Females		Total	
	Number of drivers	Percentage (%) of male drivers	Number of drivers	Percentage (%) of female drivers	Number of drivers	Percentage (%) of drivers
15–19	26	36	2	13	28	32
20–24	40	35	8	25	48	33
25–29	22	23	3	10	25	20
30–34	16	25	2	15	18	23
35–39	21	28	5	29	26	28
40–44	12	17	2	8	14	14
45–49	5	7	1	5	6	6
50–54	10	11	2	7	12	10
55–59	7	9	0	0	7	7
60+	9	5	4	5	13	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>17</b>

Source: Ministry of Transport.

**Table 2: Deaths in crashes where alcohol was a contributing factor, 2013–2015**

Casualty age	Drunk drivers	Passengers with drunk drivers	Other road users	Percentage (%) of all deaths in age group
0–14	–	2	1	11
15–19	15	24	4	46
20–24	31	17	5	47
25–29	14	6	3	28
30–39	23	5	3	32
40–49	14	4	4	23
50–59	13	5	6	19
60+	7	–	6	6
Unknown	–	2	–	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>

Source: Ministry of Transport.

## Who dies in crashes involving drunk drivers?

Crashes involving alcohol-affected drivers often harm or kill people other than the impaired driver. Table 2 above shows the number of deaths from crashes involving alcohol-affected drivers from 2013 to 2015. The table provides information on deaths by road user (the alcohol-affected driver, passengers travelling with alcohol-affected drivers, and other road users) by age of the casualty. It also provides the percentage these deaths represent of all deaths from crashes for each age group.

For every 100 alcohol-impaired drivers or riders who died in a road crash, 56 passengers (with the drunk driver) and 27 other road users also died.

## Where to find more information and statistics

The Ministry of Transport kindly provided the information in the figures and tables in this article. More information on the involvement of alcohol and other drugs in traffic crashes can be found on the Ministry of Transport website – [transport.govt.nz/research/](http://transport.govt.nz/research/).

## References

Connor, J., Kydd, R., Shield, K., & Rehm, J. (2013). *Alcohol-attributable burden of disease and injury in New Zealand: 2004 and 2007*. Wellington: Health Promotion Agency.

Ministry of Transport. (2016). *Alcohol and drugs crash facts 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.transport.govt.nz/research/crashfacts/alcohol-and-drugs/>.