


Driving under the influence of non-alcohol drugs

– legal limits implemented in Norway



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS



Drug/drink driving – a large killer on our roads

Norway has a long-standing tradition of road safety, with low death rates on the roads. A systematic, coordinated and science-based approach over many years, has led Norway to one of the leading countries in terms of road safety levels.

Vision Zero

The Norwegian government has adopted a vision of zero fatalities or serious injuries as the basis of its transport safety policy – Vision Zero. By 2024 the goal is to halve the number of fatalities and serious injuries in road traffic. The goal is an ambitious, yet attainable one.

Risk factor

Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol represents an important risk factor for traffic accidents. Together with speeding and lack of seatbelt usage, drug/drink driving is a large killer on our roads.

It has been estimated that intoxication from alcohol, drugs or medication is a probable contributing factor in 24 % of all fatal collisions in Norway.

Thus fighting the problem of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol is an important task in the Norwegian road safety work.



Severe restrictions

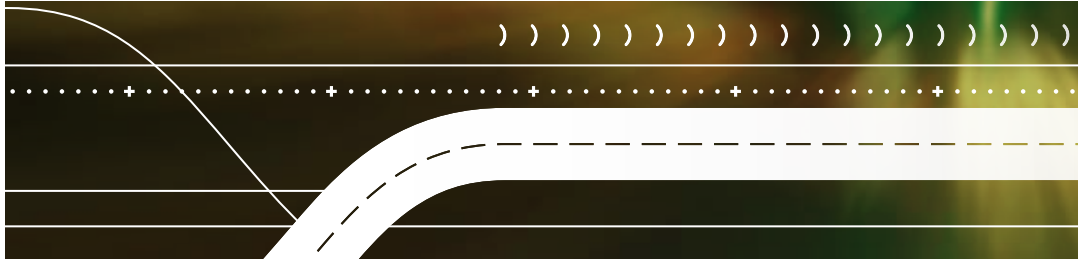
The number of roadside police checks carried out in Norway is one of the highest in Europe. Norway has introduced systematic testing for driving under the influence in all police checks.

Norway is a country with severe restrictions for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The sanctions are proportional to the offender's monthly salary and escalate as the level of alcohol and/or drug concentration levels increase, and they can range from a fine for just being over the limit to driver license withdrawal and imprisonment.

From 1 February 2012, legislative limits were introduced for non-alcohol drugs in Norway. It will be an offence to be over the impairment limits for each drug and drive vehicle, as it is with drink driving.

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Harmonizing the legal practice for driving under the influence of alcohol and illicit drugs

Since 1936, Norway has practised an impairment based law for driving under the influence of alcohol. The impairment limit for alcohol is now 0,02 % and graded sanctions are given for higher blood alcohol concentration (BACs).

For drugs other than alcohol, an individual evaluation of impairment was previously made in each case. The judicial process required an expert witness. This system was time consuming and expensive.

To harmonize the current practice for driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs – legislative limits were introduced for non-alcohol drugs in Norway from 1 February 2012.

Limits established for 20 drugs

Per se limits, representing drug concentrations in whole blood likely to be accompanied by a degree of impairment comparable to a BAC of 0,02 %, were established for 20 psychotropic drugs (see table next page).

Limits for graded sanctions, representing drug concentrations in whole blood likely to induce impairment comparable to BACs of 0,05 % and 0,12 %, were defined for 13 of the 20 substances. Some drugs don't have limits for graded sanctions, because the relationship between a drug concentration and the risk of traffic accident/impairment is variable or unknown.

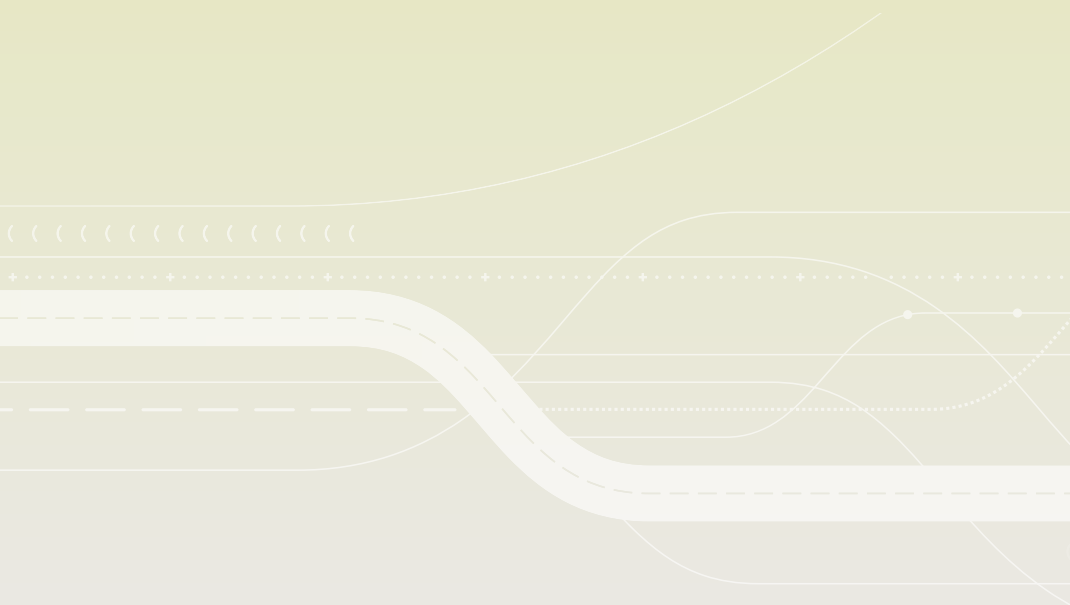
Drugs	Impairment limits comparable to 0,02 % (ng/ml in whole blood)	Limit for graded sanctions comparable to 0,05 % BAC (ng/ml in whole blood)	Limit for graded sanctions comparable to 0,12 % BAC (ng/ml in whole blood)
Alprazolam	3	6	15
Clonazepam	1.3	3	8
Diazepam	57	143	342
Fenazepam	1.8	5	10
Flunitrazepam	1.6	3	8
Nitrazepam	17	42	98
Oxazepam	172	430	860
Zolpidem	31	77	184
Zopiclone	12	23	58
THC	1.3	3	9
Amphetamine	41	*	*
Cocaine	24	*	*
MDMA	48	*	*
Methamphetamine	45	*	*
GHB	10 300	30 900	123 600
Ketamine	55	137	329
LSD	1	*	*
Buprenorphine	0.9	*	*
Methadone	25	*	*
Morphine	9	24	61

Scientific basis for the limits

An advisory group of medical experts was appointed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications to provide scientific background for limits to be included in the new regulation.

The limits defined for the 20 drugs are based mainly on experimental studies of psychomotor and cognitive performance after single doses in drug naive individuals. The experimental studies were retrieved after a comprehensive literature search undertaken in 2011, focusing on studies in which the drugs in question had been compared with alcohol.

The regulation will be updated regularly according to research and new drugs that represents a risk of impairment.



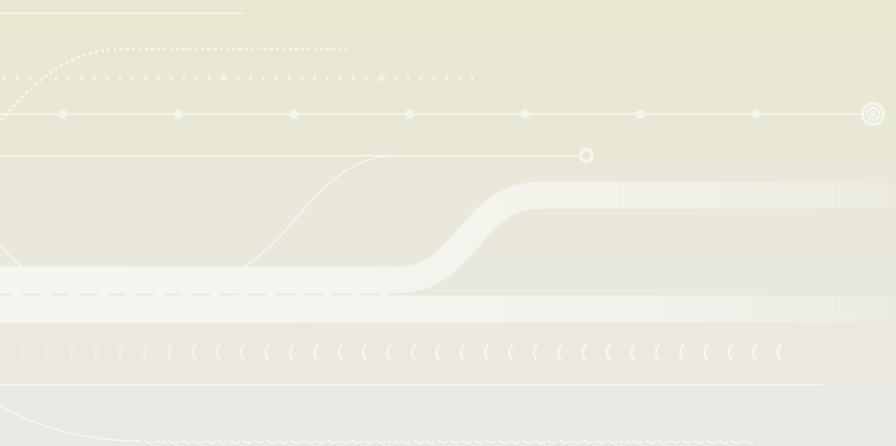
Exception – prescription drugs


The legislative limits do not apply to drivers who take medications as prescribed by their doctor, if the drugs/medication are used in accordance with the prescription.

Experience so far

Norway's experience so far shows that the number of expert witness in court has been reduced to almost half. After introducing the legal limits, numerous cases have been prosecuted without an expert witness and based solely on the reported drug concentration.

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