



# Drug Involvement of Fatally Injured Drivers

While data focusing on the danger of driving under the influence of alcohol is readily available and often cited, less is known or discussed about drivers under the influence of other drugs. The Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), a census of fatal motor vehicle traffic crashes in the United States, contains a number of variables to describe drug involvement for those in fatal crashes. The *Drug Test* variable contains three linked elements (Test Status, Test Type, and Test Result). The Test Status element provides information on whether or not the person was tested for drugs; Test Type records the type of test (if one was given); and Test Result reports which specific drug (if any) was found. Up to three tests and associated types of drugs can be recorded for an individual. The drug groupings categorized in FARS are narcotics, depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, cannabinoids, phencyclidines (PCP), anabolic steroids, and inhalants. Each drug within a group is specifically coded in FARS; for more detailed information on drug reporting in FARS, see the FARS Coding and Validation Manual (available online at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811353.pdf> under the “Drug Test” set of variables).

The data presented in this Crash\*Stats concerns fatally injured drivers, since their testing rate is higher than for surviving drivers. It is important to note that drug involvement means only that drugs were found in the driver’s system. Drug involvement does not imply impairment or indicate that drug use was the cause of the crash. Drug presence as recorded in FARS includes both illegal substances as well as over-the-counter and prescription medications, which may or may not have been misused. Unlike alcohol data in FARS,

there is no measure of the amount of drug present. Finally, nicotine, aspirin, alcohol, and drugs administered after the crash are excluded.

For each of the most recent five years of data, Table 1 shows the total national number of fatally injured drivers, as well as the number and percentage that were tested for drugs, and the test results based on the overall numbers of fatally injured drivers. Table 2 presents, for drivers with known drug test results, the number and percentage that tested positive or negative for each of the same five years. Since drug test results are unavailable for a large portion of fatally injured drivers, questions remain regarding the drug involvement of those not tested or tested with unknown results. Nationwide in 2009, 63 percent of fatally injured drivers were tested for the presence of drugs. Overall, 3,952 fatally injured drivers tested positive for drug involvement in 2009. This number represents 18 percent of all fatally injured drivers (Table 1) and 33 percent of those with known drug test results (Table 2) in 2009. Both the proportion of fatally injured drivers tested and the proportion of these drivers testing positive for drugs generally increased over the 5-year time period shown.

It should be noted that interpretation of these results must be done with caution, since drug involvement rates among those with unavailable drug test results (both those drivers not tested and those tested but for whom results are unknown) may be similar to those for whom results are available, or there may be a systematic bias that could influence the unavailable rates in a positive or negative direction.

**Table 1: Drug Test Results for Fatally Injured Drivers, 2005 – 2009**

|             | Total Drivers | All Drivers Tested | Percent Drivers Tested | Drivers Tested |     |                    |     |                 |    |
|-------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------|-----|--------------------|-----|-----------------|----|
|             |               |                    |                        | Drugs Reported |     | Drugs Not Reported |     | Results Unknown |    |
| <b>2005</b> | 27,491        | 15,363             | 56%                    | 3,710          | 13% | 9,614              | 35% | 2,039           | 7% |
| <b>2006</b> | 27,348        | 16,193             | 59%                    | 4,018          | 15% | 10,307             | 38% | 1,868           | 7% |
| <b>2007</b> | 26,570        | 16,676             | 63%                    | 4,214          | 16% | 10,679             | 40% | 1,783           | 7% |
| <b>2008</b> | 24,254        | 15,683             | 65%                    | 4,267          | 18% | 10,114             | 42% | 1,302           | 5% |
| <b>2009</b> | 21,798        | 13,801             | 63%                    | 3,952          | 18% | 8,103              | 37% | 1,746           | 8% |

**Table 2: Drug Test Results for Fatally Injured Drivers With Known Results, 2005 – 2009**

|      | Drivers Tested/ Known Results | Drugs Reported |     | Drugs Not Reported |     |
|------|-------------------------------|----------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| 2005 | 13,324                        | 3,710          | 28% | 9,614              | 72% |
| 2006 | 14,325                        | 4,018          | 28% | 10,307             | 72% |
| 2007 | 14,893                        | 4,214          | 28% | 10,679             | 72% |
| 2008 | 14,381                        | 4,267          | 30% | 10,114             | 70% |
| 2009 | 12,055                        | 3,952          | 33% | 8,103              | 67% |

The frequency of drug testing of fatally injured drivers in 2009 is shown for each State in Table 3. States vary widely in the percentage of fatally injured drivers that are reported to be tested for drugs. In 2009, Maine did not report any tests, and Mississippi reported only 2 percent tested. A number of States report testing of more than 80 percent of fatally injured drivers. Data for Massachusetts shows unknown testing status for 44 percent of fatally injured drivers in 2009, while 17 States and Puerto Rico report no drivers with unknown testing status. National totals in both tables exclude Puerto Rico.

It is important to note that States may differ in their determination of the presence or absence of a drug. Differing State and local laws, policies, and practices regarding drug test practices can introduce inconsistencies. States as well as jurisdictions within a State may test for different drugs, use different test types, and/or employ different concentration thresholds for determining a positive test result. Another

challenge for the collection of information about drugs in fatal crashes is the police accident report (PAR) itself. PARs vary across jurisdictions, creating disparities in reporting, resulting in possible variation in the reported number of crashes involving drugged driving. Additional data limitations include the variation across jurisdictions in the availability of toxicology lab work by the time the FARS file is closed as well as the possibility of contaminated test samples resulting in unknown test results. Any national or State count of drug-involved crashes should be interpreted with these limitations in mind due to potential under-reporting in some States and over-reporting in others.

For more information regarding the above reported data, contact NCSA at 202-366-4198, or toll free at 800-934-8517. This issue of Crash\*Stats and other general information on highway traffic safety may be accessed by Internet users at [www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/cats/index.aspx](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/cats/index.aspx).



**Table 3: Drug Test Results for Fatally Injured Drivers, by State, 2009**

| State            | Not Tested for Drugs |            | Tested, No Drugs Reported |            | Tested, Drugs Found |            | Tested, Results Unknown |           | Unknown if Tested |           | Total         |
|------------------|----------------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|
|                  | Number               | Percent    | Number                    | Percent    | Number              | Percent    | Number                  | Percent   | Number            | Percent   | Number        |
| Alabama          | 269                  | 44%        | 33                        | 5%         | 31                  | 5%         | 274                     | 45%       | 3                 | 0%        | 610           |
| Alaska           | 11                   | 33%        | 11                        | 33%        | 7                   | 21%        | 0                       | 0%        | 4                 | 12%       | 33            |
| Arizona          | 129                  | 30%        | 129                       | 30%        | 82                  | 19%        | 8                       | 2%        | 79                | 19%       | 427           |
| Arkansas         | 277                  | 65%        | 82                        | 19%        | 66                  | 16%        | 0                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 425           |
| California       | 187                  | 11%        | 1,013                     | 60%        | 388                 | 23%        | 90                      | 5%        | 0                 | 0%        | 1,678         |
| Colorado         | 49                   | 16%        | 149                       | 48%        | 72                  | 23%        | 41                      | 13%       | 1                 | 0%        | 312           |
| Connecticut      | 2                    | 1%         | 29                        | 18%        | 90                  | 57%        | 12                      | 8%        | 24                | 15%       | 157           |
| Delaware         | 46                   | 67%        | 12                        | 17%        | 9                   | 13%        | 2                       | 3%        | 0                 | 0%        | 69            |
| Dist of Columbia | 0                    | 0%         | 5                         | 50%        | 3                   | 30%        | 0                       | 0%        | 2                 | 20%       | 10            |
| Florida          | 622                  | 42%        | 622                       | 42%        | 239                 | 16%        | 2                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 1,485         |
| Georgia          | 414                  | 48%        | 285                       | 33%        | 121                 | 14%        | 43                      | 5%        | 0                 | 0%        | 863           |
| Hawaii           | 0                    | 0%         | 47                        | 64%        | 25                  | 34%        | 0                       | 0%        | 2                 | 3%        | 74            |
| Idaho            | 79                   | 54%        | 45                        | 31%        | 13                  | 9%         | 8                       | 5%        | 2                 | 1%        | 147           |
| Illinois         | 128                  | 22%        | 312                       | 54%        | 132                 | 23%        | 2                       | 0%        | 1                 | 0%        | 575           |
| Indiana          | 190                  | 39%        | 173                       | 35%        | 108                 | 22%        | 22                      | 4%        | 0                 | 0%        | 493           |
| Iowa             | 244                  | 89%        | 13                        | 5%         | 8                   | 3%         | 9                       | 3%        | 0                 | 0%        | 274           |
| Kansas           | 173                  | 64%        | 61                        | 23%        | 34                  | 13%        | 2                       | 1%        | 1                 | 0%        | 271           |
| Kentucky         | 151                  | 26%        | 254                       | 43%        | 182                 | 31%        | 1                       | 0%        | 3                 | 1%        | 591           |
| Louisiana        | 170                  | 32%        | 56                        | 10%        | 57                  | 11%        | 230                     | 43%       | 26                | 5%        | 539           |
| Maine            | 121                  | 100%       | 0                         | 0%         | 0                   | 0%         | 0                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 121           |
| Maryland         | 31                   | 9%         | 200                       | 59%        | 85                  | 25%        | 1                       | 0%        | 21                | 6%        | 338           |
| Massachusetts    | 13                   | 6%         | 69                        | 33%        | 20                  | 9%         | 16                      | 8%        | 94                | 44%       | 212           |
| Michigan         | 140                  | 26%        | 133                       | 24%        | 107                 | 20%        | 64                      | 12%       | 102               | 19%       | 546           |
| Minnesota        | 23                   | 9%         | 189                       | 72%        | 24                  | 9%         | 5                       | 2%        | 23                | 9%        | 264           |
| Mississippi      | 476                  | 98%        | 0                         | 0%         | 4                   | 1%         | 0                       | 0%        | 7                 | 1%        | 487           |
| Missouri         | 277                  | 46%        | 151                       | 25%        | 161                 | 27%        | 8                       | 1%        | 3                 | 1%        | 600           |
| Montana          | 28                   | 17%        | 4                         | 2%         | 124                 | 77%        | 0                       | 0%        | 5                 | 3%        | 161           |
| Nebraska         | 123                  | 73%        | 32                        | 19%        | 14                  | 8%         | 0                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 169           |
| Nevada           | 10                   | 7%         | 89                        | 63%        | 28                  | 20%        | 15                      | 11%       | 0                 | 0%        | 142           |
| New Hampshire    | 14                   | 20%        | 40                        | 56%        | 13                  | 18%        | 1                       | 1%        | 3                 | 4%        | 71            |
| New Jersey       | 48                   | 15%        | 189                       | 60%        | 71                  | 23%        | 0                       | 0%        | 6                 | 2%        | 314           |
| New Mexico       | 0                    | 0%         | 219                       | 99%        | 2                   | 1%         | 0                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 221           |
| New York         | 27                   | 4%         | 342                       | 56%        | 93                  | 15%        | 3                       | 0%        | 146               | 24%       | 611           |
| North Carolina   | 2                    | 0%         | 521                       | 59%        | 10                  | 1%         | 347                     | 39%       | 0                 | 0%        | 880           |
| North Dakota     | 30                   | 33%        | 36                        | 40%        | 12                  | 13%        | 0                       | 0%        | 13                | 14%       | 91            |
| Ohio             | 115                  | 16%        | 362                       | 51%        | 205                 | 29%        | 21                      | 3%        | 0                 | 0%        | 703           |
| Oklahoma         | 466                  | 89%        | 31                        | 6%         | 24                  | 5%         | 0                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 521           |
| Oregon           | 196                  | 79%        | 30                        | 12%        | 22                  | 9%         | 0                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 248           |
| Pennsylvania     | 98                   | 11%        | 472                       | 55%        | 149                 | 17%        | 135                     | 16%       | 5                 | 1%        | 859           |
| Rhode Island     | 19                   | 41%        | 12                        | 26%        | 6                   | 13%        | 0                       | 0%        | 9                 | 20%       | 46            |
| South Carolina   | 69                   | 11%        | 292                       | 48%        | 162                 | 26%        | 0                       | 0%        | 91                | 15%       | 614           |
| South Dakota     | 47                   | 53%        | 29                        | 33%        | 7                   | 8%         | 6                       | 7%        | 0                 | 0%        | 89            |
| Tennessee        | 262                  | 38%        | 79                        | 12%        | 91                  | 13%        | 250                     | 37%       | 0                 | 0%        | 682           |
| Texas            | 842                  | 42%        | 579                       | 29%        | 461                 | 23%        | 14                      | 1%        | 125               | 6%        | 2,021         |
| Utah             | 102                  | 69%        | 28                        | 19%        | 14                  | 9%         | 2                       | 1%        | 2                 | 1%        | 148           |
| Vermont          | 4                    | 7%         | 26                        | 46%        | 22                  | 39%        | 0                       | 0%        | 4                 | 7%        | 56            |
| Virginia         | 161                  | 32%        | 171                       | 33%        | 82                  | 16%        | 0                       | 0%        | 97                | 19%       | 511           |
| Washington       | 19                   | 6%         | 154                       | 51%        | 116                 | 38%        | 0                       | 0%        | 15                | 5%        | 304           |
| West Virginia    | 11                   | 4%         | 175                       | 69%        | 65                  | 26%        | 0                       | 0%        | 3                 | 1%        | 254           |
| Wisconsin        | 130                  | 33%        | 78                        | 20%        | 74                  | 19%        | 112                     | 28%       | 1                 | 0%        | 395           |
| Wyoming          | 26                   | 30%        | 40                        | 47%        | 17                  | 20%        | 0                       | 0%        | 3                 | 3%        | 86            |
| <b>National</b>  | <b>7,071</b>         | <b>32%</b> | <b>8,103</b>              | <b>37%</b> | <b>3,952</b>        | <b>18%</b> | <b>1,746</b>            | <b>8%</b> | <b>926</b>        | <b>4%</b> | <b>21,798</b> |
| Puerto Rico      | 61                   | 36%        | 86                        | 51%        | 22                  | 13%        | 0                       | 0%        | 0                 | 0%        | 169           |