Driving under the influence of any impairing substance is a major cause of motor vehicle crashes. Cannabis can affect driving-related skills, such as response time and the ability to divide attention. Cannabis use is increasing nationwide: a 2014 survey by the CDC found that there were 7,000 new cannabis users every day. Although the impact of acute cannabis use on driving is not clear, it is important that you and your patients understand the facts related to cannabis use and the potential effects on driving.

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Risks associated with medical or recreational cannabis use include:

- Uncertain variability in dosage (THC levels)
- Overdose due to delayed onset of effects (e.g., with edibles, taking another dose before the full effects of the first dose are realized)
- Driving impairment
- Negative synergistic effect on driving when mixed with alcohol
- Children’s access

Pilot studies suggest that cannabis may have some therapeutic benefit in reducing pain and chemotherapy side effects, as well as in the treatment of conditions such as multiple sclerosis, seizures, and neuropathy.

Among drivers tested in fatal vehicle crashes, drivers who test positive for drugs of potential abuse (e.g., cannabis, opioids, and benzodiazepines) now surpass those testing positive for alcohol.

While research at the University of California San Diego and elsewhere will further clarify the driving safety risk, current evidence suggests that acute cannabis use impairs several abilities important for safe driving:

- Slowed reaction time
- Increased distractability
- Decreased visuospatial skills
- Poor decision-making and route planning

Estimates of crash risk while under the influence of cannabis vary. Complexity of metabolism, form of ingestion, dosage, and habituation influence the effect of cannabis on driving. Research approximates the risk of motor vehicle crashes when under the influence of cannabis (without alcohol) to be two-fold.