



Central Office: 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT 06109 Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823
Berlin: 240 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT 06037 Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248
Newington: 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT 06111 Phone (860) 665-8586 Fax (860) 665-8533
Rocky Hill: 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067 Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax (860) 258-2767
www.ccthd.org

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Don't Let Drunk Driving Ruin Your Holiday Spirit

In what feels like a whirlwind, it's hard to believe that the holidays are already upon us. Families have begun to prepare by shopping and making plans for family and friends to gather together for meals and parties. The period of time between Thanksgiving and New Years is probably the busiest time of year, but also one of the most dangerous. This combination of traveling and alcohol leads to an increased number of drunken driving cases. Don't let this holiday be the last for you and your family members – don't drink and drive.

Did you know that on average, someone is killed every 52 minutes in a drunken driving crash? According to Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD), that was about 10,228 people in 2010 alone, with someone being injured every 90 seconds. In fact, if all 17 million people who admitted to driving drunk in 2010 had their own state, it would be the 5th largest state in the United States.

While the holidays are particularly dangerous for any drunk drivers, the most common groups of people to be involved in drunken driving crashes all year round are men, with a staggering 78 percent involvement, and young adults, ages 21 to 34. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), young adults are at greatest risk for driving impaired, with the *highest* percentage of **all** age groups for involvement in crashes related to drunken driving in 2010. Although drunken driving can occur at any time of the day, nighttime driving is the most deadly, with 78 percent of crashes occurring between 6:00pm and 5:59am. In fact, nearly half of all crashes occurred between 12:00am to 2:59am – right around the time that most bars and clubs close in Connecticut.

Since we know that the holiday season is upon us, this is the perfect time to issue some reminders about avoiding alcohol related incidents.

First, watch out for signs of impairment in others. When driving, be sure to stay a safe distance away from other drivers who are driving erratically, such as weaving from one side of the road to the other, making excessively wide turns at intersections, follow other vehicles too closely, drive too fast or too slow, break unnecessarily or stop inappropriately or are slow to respond to traffic signals.

Second, we need to be just a vigilant with regard to pedestrians as we are with impaired driver. If you know someone who is drinking and planning to walk home, be sure to call a cab or offer to drive (if you are the designated driver). While driving, watch out for other pedestrians who may be under the influence of alcohol by looking for sudden, unexpected movements. And if you plan to walk anywhere, be sure to limit the amount of alcohol you consume and carry a flashlight with you so that other drivers can see you.

Third, do not drive impaired; use the designated driver system to choose a driver who agrees to remain alcohol free, or call a cab. If you do drink, limit the number of alcoholic beverages and pace yourself. Be sure to eat meals or substantial snacks in between drinks, and consider alternating drinks with non-alcoholic substitutes, such as water or soda. Even if you think you are not impaired, if another person believes you have had too much to drink, use a designated driver, call a cab or spend the night. Always remember - be responsible.

Whether you are a host or a guest, be sure that you and your family and friends are safe this holiday season. For more information about drunk driving, visit the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) website at www.madd.org or the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) at www.nhtsa.gov.

For further information about this or any other public health issue, contact the Central Connecticut Health District,

serving the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield, by calling (860)721-2822 or by visiting our website at www.ccthd.org.