

Fatal crashes in the US: Fewer Canadian drivers under the influence

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A new study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy and Columbia University finds alcohol-related fatal motor vehicle crashes in the U.S. are much lower among drivers with Canadian licenses than drivers with U.S. or Mexican licenses. The prevalence of alcohol involvement in fatal crashes was 27 percent for both U.S. and Mexican drivers, and 11 percent for Canadian drivers. Similarly, alcohol impairment was found in 23 percent of U.S. and Mexican drivers and 8 percent of Canadian drivers involved in a fatal crash. Research from other countries finds foreign drivers are at greater risk of crashes than native drivers. In contrast, this study shows that drivers licensed in Mexico and Canada who were involved in fatal crashes in the U.S. had the same or less alcohol impairment than U.S.-licensed drivers. The report is published in the October issue of *Injury Prevention* and is available on the journal's website.

"Our findings were unexpected, partly because the substantial [cultural differences](#) between the U.S. and Mexico led us to anticipate differences in alcohol-related crashes," said lead study author Susan P. Baker, a professor with the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy, part of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "We also anticipated that Canadian [drivers](#) in U.S. crashes would be similar to U.S. drivers because the rate of alcohol-related [fatal crashes](#) is similar within the two countries." Together, Mexican and Canadian drivers comprise more than 70 percent of all foreign-licensed drivers involved in fatal crashes in the U.S.

As a possible explanation, the researchers speculate that the less prominent role of alcohol in fatal crashes of Canadian-licensed drivers in the U.S. may suggest that a larger proportion of Canadians were traveling on vacation or business, situations that may be less likely to involve alcohol. Crashes at night (when alcohol is more likely to be involved) were also least common among Canadian-licensed drivers. And finally, it is also possible that Canadians are less likely to drive after drinking.

Data for this study came from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration database of fatal traffic crashes. Study subjects were drivers aged 16 years or older who were licensed in the U.S., Mexico, or Canada and involved in a crash in the U.S. from 1998 to 2008, which resulted in at least one death. Alcohol involvement was defined as having a BAC of 0.01 g/dl or greater, and alcohol impairment was defined as having a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or higher.

More information: "Alcohol in fatal crashes involving Mexican and Canadian drivers in the USA" *Injury Prevention* (2011).

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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