

# Drinking age laws have a significant effect on collisions among young drivers

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Dr. Russ Callaghan, associate professor with the Northern Medical Program.  
Credit: Northern Medical Program

Minimum legal drinking age legislation in Canada can have a major impact on young drivers, according to a new study from the Northern Medical Program at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). Drivers just older than the legal age had a significant increase in motor vehicle crashes compared to those immediately under the restriction.

In the study, published this week in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Dr. Russ Callaghan and his research team looked at Quebec [motor vehicle collision](#) statistics between 2000 and 2012 which involved

[young drivers](#). They found that, compared to those just below legal age, there was an abrupt increase of 6 per cent in collisions for drivers at or above the minimum [legal drinking age](#) (MLDA). This increase was even more marked at night when collisions increased by 11 per cent immediately at the minimum legal [drinking age](#).

"As soon as youth are given legal access to alcohol, there are immediate effects on the road," says Dr. Callaghan, the study's lead author and an associate professor in the Northern Medical Program. "The number of collisions involving both male and female drivers who have just reached legal drinking age rises dramatically, which illustrates the impact that alcohol-related legislation can have on population harm and injury prevention."

At present time, the minimum legal drinking age is 18 years of age in Alberta, Manitoba, and Québec, and 19 years in the rest of Canada. Recently, the Canadian Public Health Association and a national expert-panel working group have recommended that the legal drinking age be raised to 19 years across the country.

"Our research provides current information for both Canadian and international policymakers to draw on when considering alcohol policy reform and the effectiveness of MLDA legislation," says Callaghan. "Drinking-age laws can have major consequences on driving safety and are an important part of contemporary alcohol-control and driving-related policies designed to limit the [motor vehicle collisions](#) in youth."

According to the research, raising the drinking age to 19 years in Québec would prevent 337 police-reported collisions per year that involved at least one 18-year old driver. If it were raised to 21 years, it could be expected that approximately 583 police-reported collisions per year could be prevented for drivers between 18 and 20 years of age.

Dr. Callaghan's research is part of a larger series of studies he is pursuing over the next several years that investigate the impact of alcohol-related legislation on a variety of harms, including mortality, hospital emergency admissions, in-patient admissions, injury, and crimes, such as sexual assaults and disorderly conduct.

**More information:** The full research paper is available to view online until January 7, 2015 at [authors.elsevier.com/a/1Q2wc2gOwFfxSy](https://authors.elsevier.com/a/1Q2wc2gOwFfxSy)

Provided by University of Northern British Columbia

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