Department for Transport

Development of drug driving statistics in Great Britain

Mike Dark

Road Safety Statistics, Department for Transport

27th September 2022

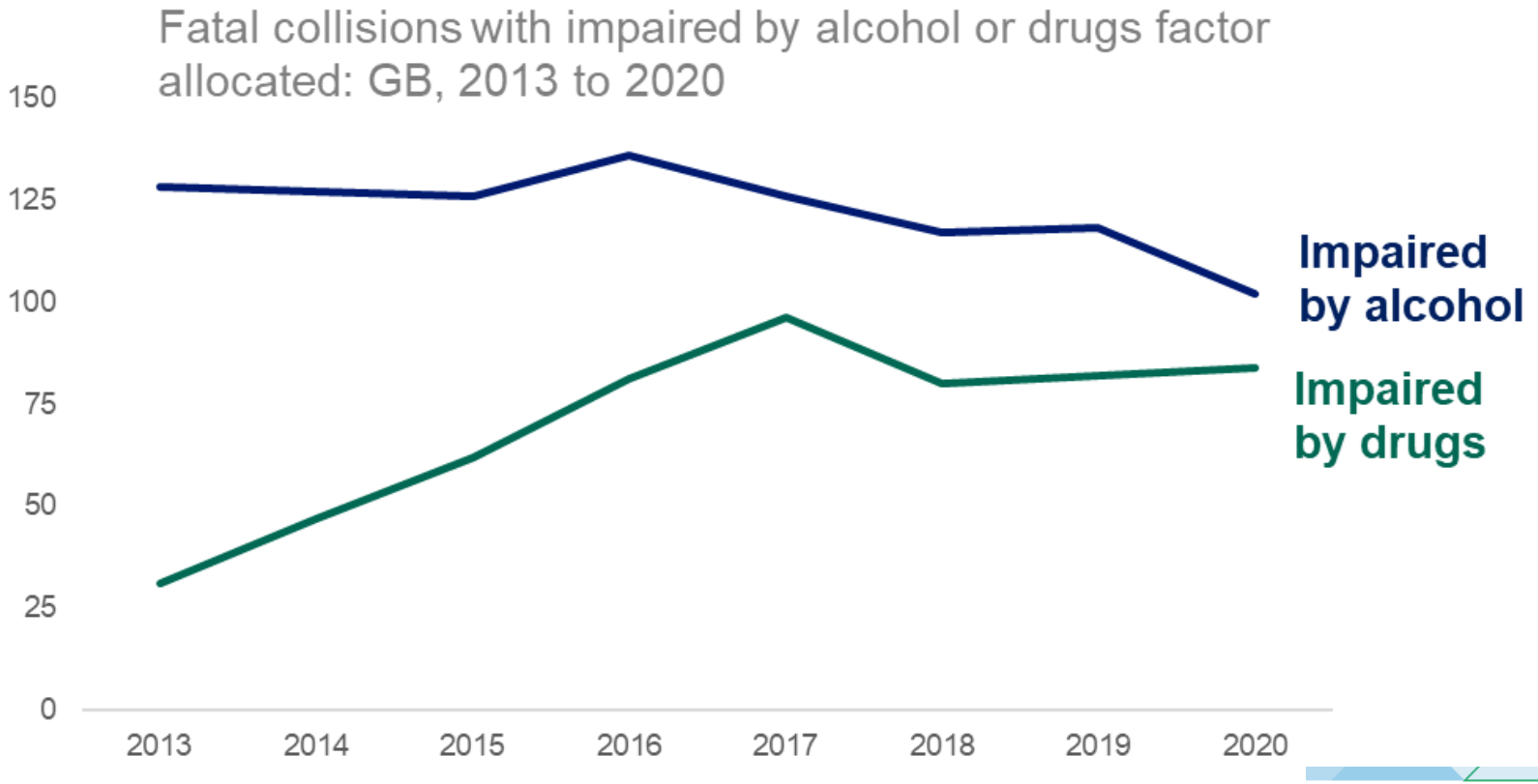
Introduction

Introduction

- The Department for Transport has produced statistics for reported road casualties in Great Britain involving drivers with illegal alcohol levels for many years, with the most recent statistics for 2020. These estimates are based on data from coroners of deceased drivers as well as breath tests conducted by the police at the roadside.
- There has been a policy requirement to measure the extent of drug driving as it is an increasing issue on UK roads.
- At present, we have two main sources of drug-driving data
    - Crime survey for England and Wales (self reported drug-driving)
    - Contributory factor data in reported road collisions in Great Britain where a police officer attended the scene

Contributory factor ‘impaired by drugs’ shows increase over time in fatal collisions

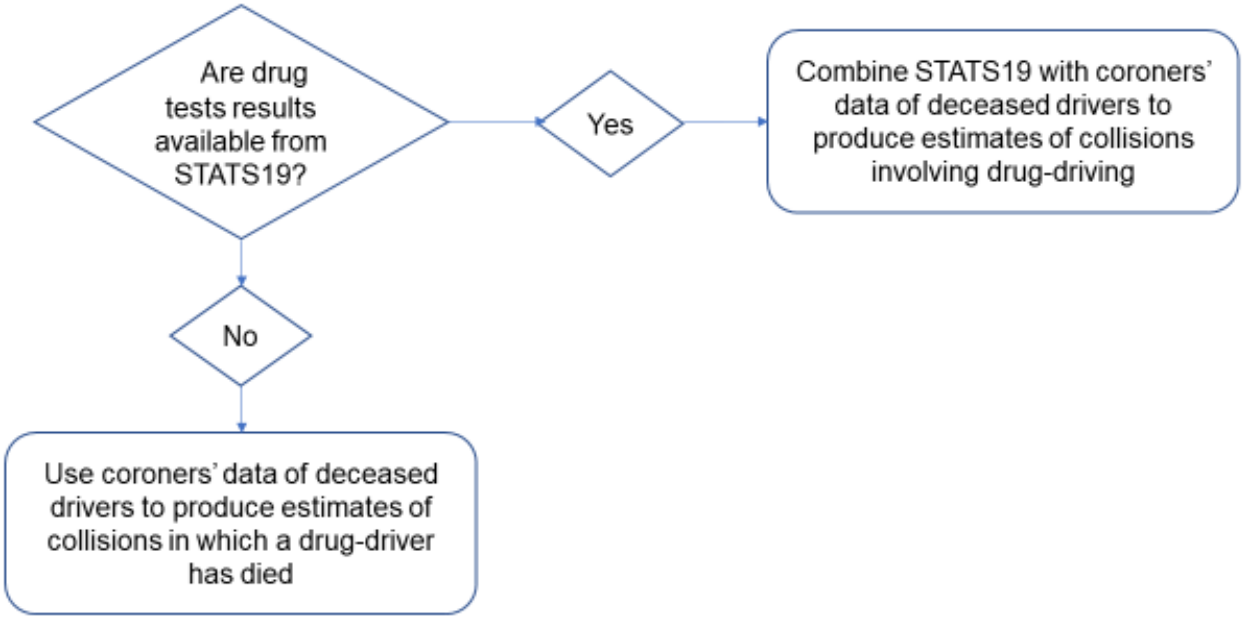
- When a police officer attends the scene of a collision, they can allocated up to six factors that they believe contributed to it. Factors include ‘impaired by alcohol’ and ‘impaired by drugs’ - which includes prescription drugs as well as illicit drugs.
- This data shows an increase in collisions in which a police officer believed ‘impaired by drugs’ contributed to the collision.



Background to the feasibility study

Analysis is limited to fatal collisions

- The STATS19 data (of reported road collisions in Great Britain involving an injury or fatality of a road user) provides details of the results of breath tests.
- However, there is currently no data available of the results of drug tests
- So as an initial step we have produced an analysis of fatalities where at least one of the driver or rider fatalities involved in the collision had drugs detected that were reported by the coroner



Outline of the initial feasibility study

Producing estimates of drug-driving even for road fatalities is not as straightforward as for drink-driving

- it is necessary to distinguish between recreational drugs and prescribed drugs that impair driving from those that do not.
- unlike alcohol, where there is only one thing to test for, there are many different drugs which can impair driving, with different legal limits. The list of drugs covered by legislation is available
- We also need to determine which drugs found in the body may have been administered by paramedics at the scene, rather than taken by the road user prior to the collision.
- There are limitations about how/when drugs are taken from blood or urine and the time they stay in the body after death.

Drug-driving limits as specified in legislation

The limits of drug driving vary enormously and are shown below:

'Illegal' drugs ('accidental exposure' – zero tolerance approach)	Threshold limit in microgrammes per litre of blood (µg/L)
benzoylecgonine	50µg/L
cocaine	10µg/L
delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (cannabis)	2µg/L
ketamine	20µg/L
lysergic acid diethylamide	1µg/L
methylamphetamine	10µg/L
Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)	10µg/L
6-monoacetylmorphine (heroin)	5µg/L

'Medicinal' drugs (risk based approach)	Threshold limit in blood
clonazepam	50µg/L
diazepam	550µg/L
flunitrazepam	300µg/L
lorazepam	100µg/L
methadone	500µg/L
morphine	80µg/L
oxazepam	300µg/L
temazepam	1,000µg/L

Separate approach (to balance its risk)	Threshold limit in blood
amphetamine	250µg/L

Classification of drugs

The National Programme for Substance Abuse Deaths (NPSAD) coding was used to classify the drugs into the nine categories.

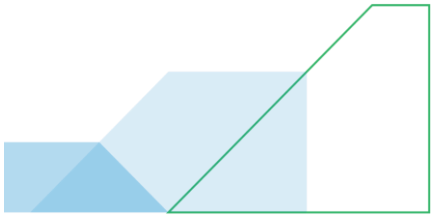
Of these, there are three categories that impair the ability to drive safely:

- **Psychoactive medications** with impairment potential (e.g. benzodiazepines) - Drugs that fall into this category can of course be abused (e.g. benzodiazepines)
- **Query psychoactive drugs** – drugs that could be prescribed/abused or used in emergency medical treatment (morphine, alfentanil, fentanyl, ketamine). We looked at the combination of drugs to work out cases when likely to have been administered by paramedic and excluded those, but can't always be sure).
- **Drugs of abuse** (e.g. cocaine, LSD) – these are drugs that have no medical use according to The Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001

Results of the feasibility study

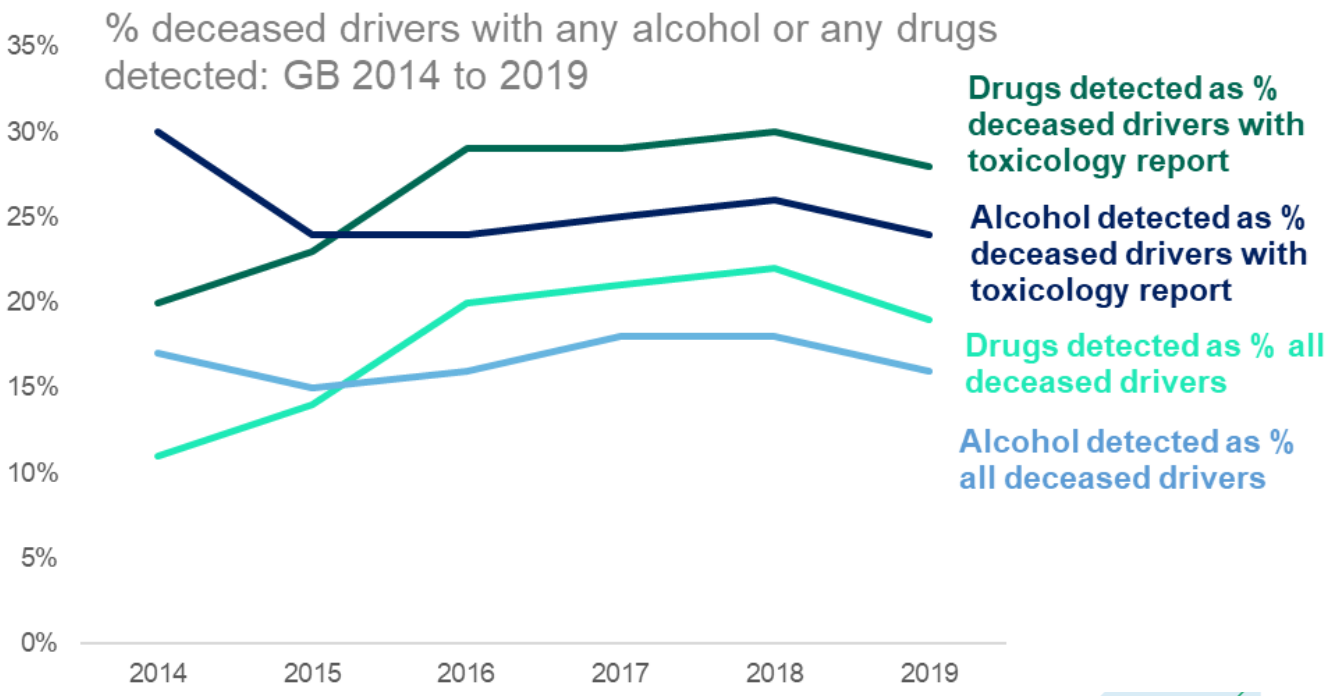
Percentage of deceased drivers with impairment drugs or alcohol detected

- It is possible that the presence of alcohol or drugs are more likely to be tested for in cases where use is suspected.
- If this is so the percentage of drivers tested where drugs or alcohol have been detected will be on the high side.
- The percentage of those with drugs or alcohol detected as a percentage of all deceased drivers (including those where no report has been provided) will be on low side as there will potentially be some drivers where drugs or alcohol would have been detected had a report had been provided.
- The true figure, therefore, is likely to be between the two.



Presence of impairment drugs in deceased drivers has increased over time

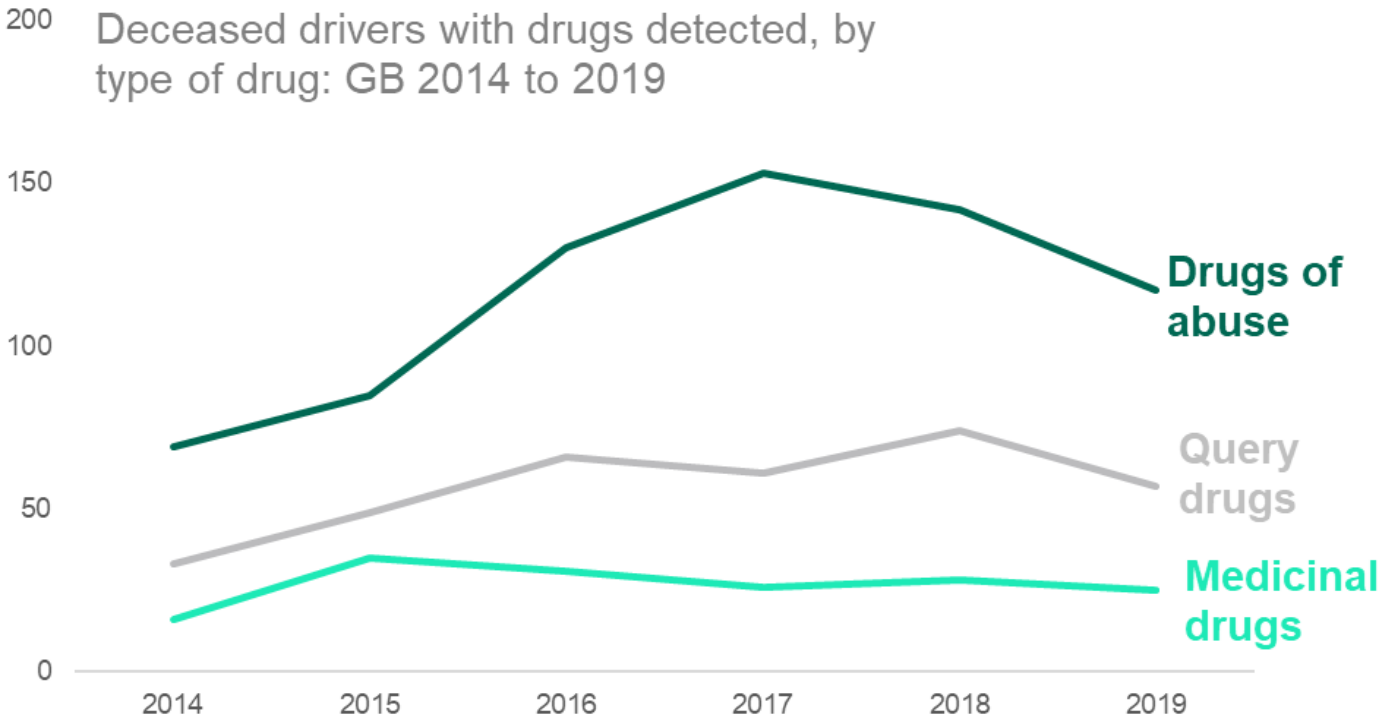
- Drugs detected in between 19% and 28% of deceased drivers in 2019 compared to between 11% and 20% in 2014.
- Alcohol was detected in between 16% and 24% of deceased drivers in 2019 compared to between 17% and 30% in 2014.
- So drug-driving appears to have increased relative to drink-driving over time – in line with the contributory factor data.



Deceased drivers with drugs increased over time – majority of cases involve illegal drugs

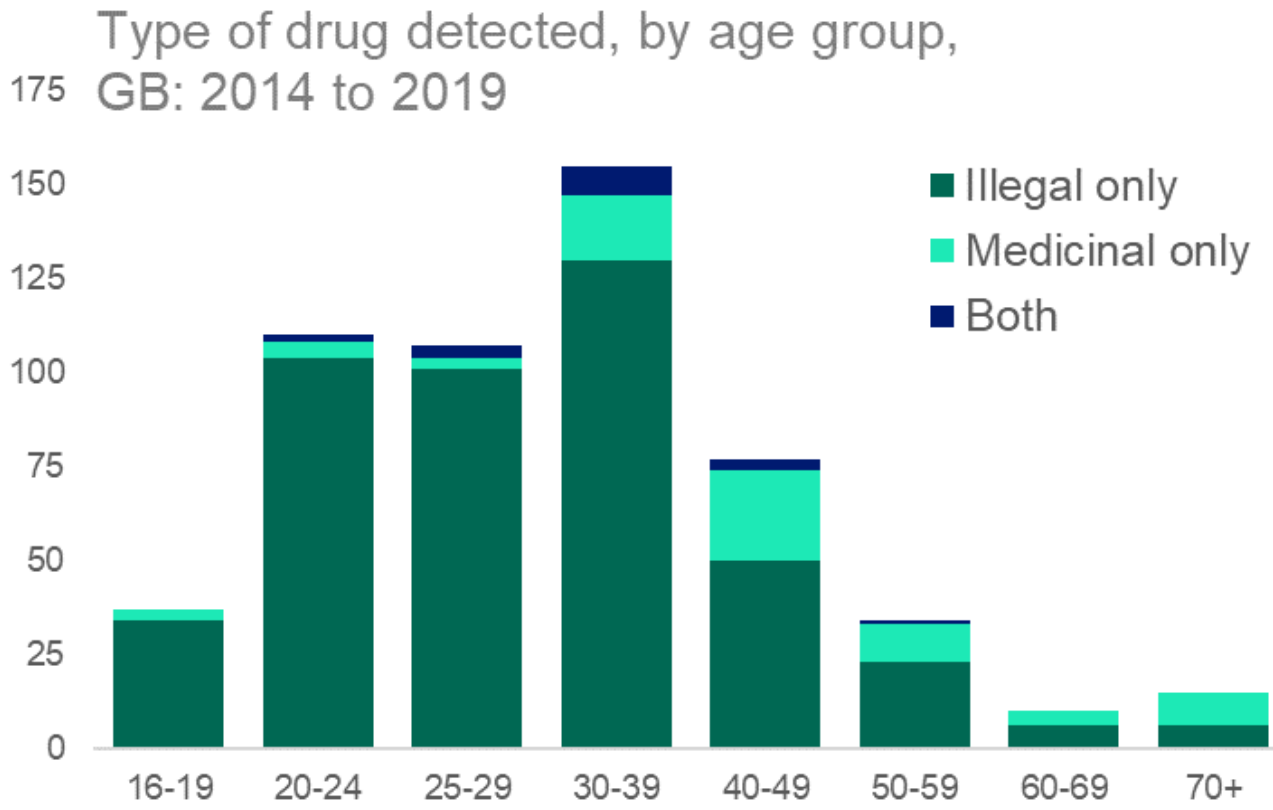
- The number of deceased drivers with drugs detected in fatal collisions has increased by over 60% from 2014 to 2019. While this could reflect changes to testing, the increase is broadly in line with that for the 'impaired by drugs' contributory factor recorded in STATS19

- In 2019, a majority of drivers where drugs were detected had illegal drugs in their body (117), followed by query drugs (57) and prescribed drugs (25).



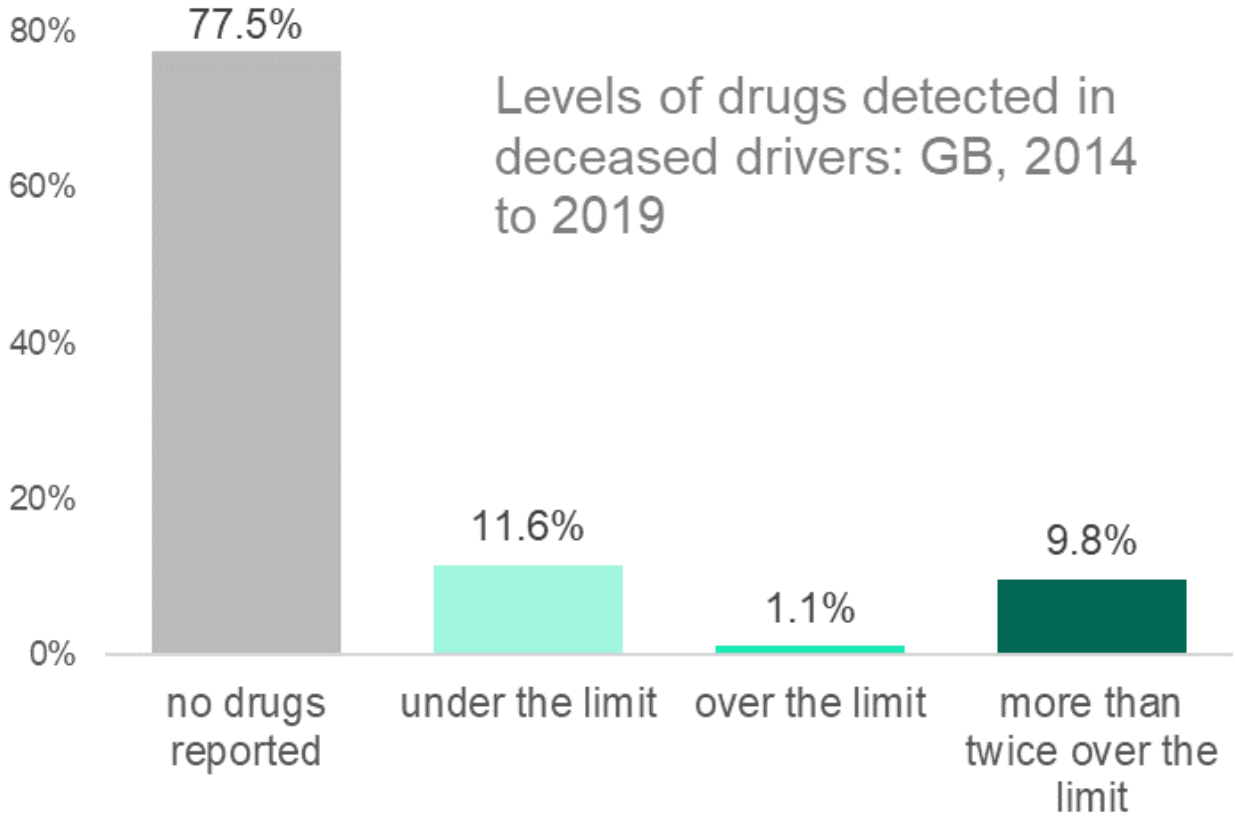
More drugs detected in deceased drivers in their 30s than any other age group

- Illegal drugs were detected mainly in drivers aged 20 to 39
- Medicinal drugs were detected more in 30 to 49 year olds
- Only in drivers aged 70 or more were medicinal drugs detected more than in illegal drugs although the numbers of both are very small in this age group



Nearly 4 in 5 of deceased drivers have no drugs present. The remaining fifth are split evenly between those under the limit and over the limit

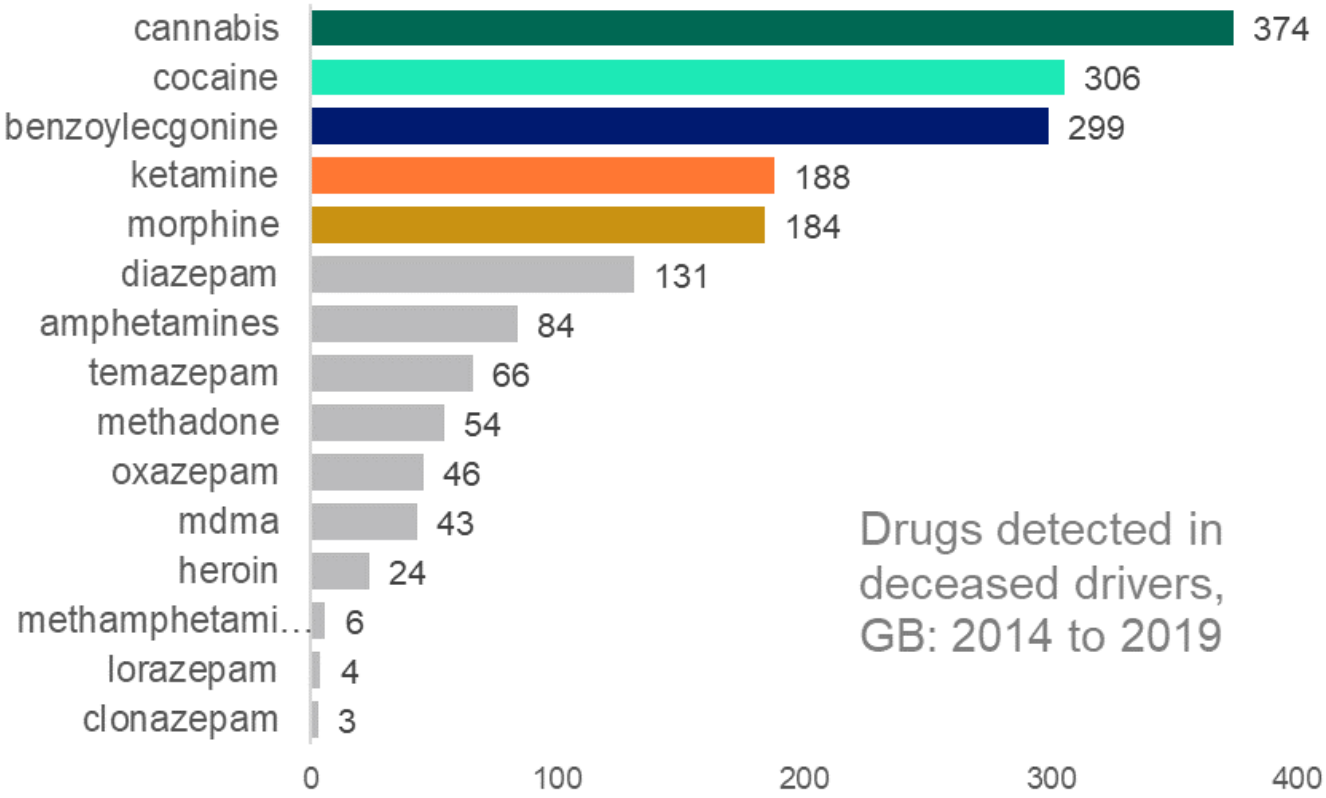
- There were no drugs reported for 78% of deceased drivers.
- The number of drivers that had some drugs present but less than the drug-drive limit was 12%.
- Only 1% of drivers were over the drug-drive limit but under twice the limit, yet 10% were more than twice over the drug-drive limit.



Most common drugs found in deceased drivers are cannabis followed by cocaine

- Of the drugs specified in the drug-drive legislation, there were fifteen detected in deceased drivers between 2014 and 2019

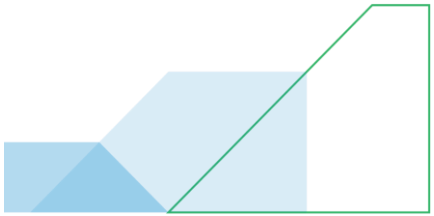
- The five most frequently detected were cannabis, cocaine, benzoylecgonine (cocaine metabolite), ketamine and morphine.



Proposed next steps

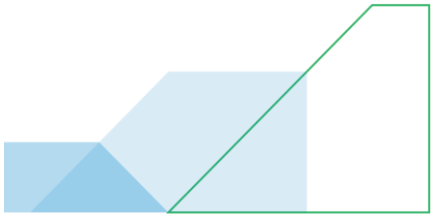
Summary

- The production of estimates of drug driving is in the early stages in the UK. As we do not yet have data on the result of drug tests conducted by the police, these estimates are based on toxicology reports of deceased drivers from coroner reports. The latest statistics data are currently for 2019.
- While there are a number of caveats which must be kept in mind, we believe that these results are promising in terms of the amount of data captured and the broad comparability with for example data from contributory factors.



Proposed next steps

- The most recent STATS19 review proposed that it collects additional data on drug tests conducted by the police.
- This would enable us to estimate the overall number of road casualties where one of more driver or rider where over the drug-drive limit for any of the drugs specified in the legislation (in a similar way to what is currently done for drink-drive casualties)



Your experiences

- We would happy to hear of your experiences of measuring the extent of drug-driving in your country
- Email us at ROADACC.STATS@dft.gov.uk
- Our feasibility study on which presentation is based is available.
- The latest review of the UK's STATS19 road collision data collection is also available.