



Press Release – 9 April 2010

Lower blood alcohol limit now – Alcohol Healthwatch

Alcohol Healthwatch says strong support for cutting the alcohol level for adult drivers shown in a recent poll underlines yet again that there is no reason to delay introduction of such a measure.

The Research New Zealand poll found 63 percent of those surveyed supported lowering the adult blood-alcohol limit from .08 to .05.

Alcohol Healthwatch Director Rebecca Williams says the latest poll result supports a Ministry of Transport survey of public attitudes carried out last year. That survey found that 85 percent of Kiwis thought drivers should be limited to two or fewer drinks before driving - the level of alcohol consumption that matches a .05 blood alcohol level.

"A blood alcohol limit of .05 would allow people to have a one or two drinks with a meal and drive", Williams says.

"The difference is they would be far less likely to have a serious accident behind the wheel than if they were drinking up to the .08 limit – which can be as many as six drinks over 90 minutes."

"The current blood alcohol limit of .08 means New Zealand drivers over 30 years are about 16 times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than before drinking. The crash rate goes up exponentially in younger driver groups, up to 86.6 times the risk for young drivers between 15 and 19 years. It allows people to consume so much alcohol that important driving skills including vision, steering, and braking are adversely affected.

"By reducing the level from .08 to .05, New Zealand will join over 20 other countries which already have a blood alcohol limit of .05, including Australia, Canada and 14 European countries.

She says allowing people to drive their cars at the current New Zealand limit is essentially legally endorsing intoxicated driving.

"Lowering the blood alcohol limit could translate into saving between 15 and 30 lives a year and preventing between 320 and 686 injuries.

"Decreases in blood alcohol limits have shown to reduce the risk of crashing, reduce death and injury and improve attitudes towards traffic safety and drinking behaviour.

"We call on the Government to reduce the blood alcohol limit to .05 without delay."

ENDS

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Action on Liquor - See www.ahw.org.nz for policy briefing papers on key liquor issues: including Warning Labels, Taxation, Sale of Liquor, Advertising, **Blood Alcohol Concentration for Driving** and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.