



DRIVER SAFETY LETTER



NPTC
National Private Truck Council

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Allergies and Medicine Effects

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Spring arrives this week, bringing with it a surge of seasonal allergies. Experts predict the 2025 allergy season could be more severe than previous years. As allergy season officially begins, it's important to know that some over-the-counter allergy medications can significantly impair your ability to drive a Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV).

Researchers at the University of Iowa tested allergy sufferers in a driving simulator and found that the antihistamine diphenhydramine (commonly found in many allergy and cold medications) significantly impaired a driver's ability to follow, steer and maintain the correct lane. The study revealed that diphenhydramine has a greater impact on driving performance than alcohol.

According to researchers, of the 39 million Americans who suffer from hay fever and allergies, only 4.8 million take prescription medications. The remainder either go without treatment or use over-the-counter medications. While these medications can be effective, they often come with warnings about potential drowsiness and the need to exercise caution when driving or operating machinery.

Researchers emphasize that even if you do not feel drowsy while taking allergy medications, you may still be impaired.

When drivers take over-the-counter medications, they often underestimate the effects these drugs have on cognitive and motor abilities. Many do not consider that they are taking a drug that could impair their driving. Even after reading the warning labels, it is common to assume that restrictions apply only to certain individuals or that "do not operate heavy machinery" refers exclusively to farm equipment or tractors—forgetting that CMVs fall under this category as well. Additionally, many drugs include warnings about drowsiness or dizziness that people tend to ignore. However, this is a serious issue, contributing to thousands of vehicle crashes each year.

The risk of operating a CMV while impaired or overly fatigued can be fatal.

Drugs affect the body in various ways—they can blur vision, induce fatigue or overexcitement, alter depth perception, create hallucinations, raise or lower blood pressure, and impact reaction time. They interfere with concentration and motor coordination. These effects can result from any type of drug, whether illegal, prescription, or over-the-counter. When brain function is altered, muscle and nerve function are also impacted.

Antihistamines, which work by blocking allergic reactions, slow down reaction time and impair coordination.

Over-the-counter decongestants can cause drowsiness, anxiety, and dizziness. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), drowsy driving is responsible for approximately 100,000 traffic crashes and 1,500 deaths annually.

Common prescription medications—including those used to treat allergies, pain, diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, ulcers, depression, anxiety disorders and insomnia—can cause drowsiness, affect vision and impair other driving-related skills.

Tranquilizers, sedatives and sleeping pills slow down the central nervous system, causing drowsiness, delayed reaction times, and reduced concentration.

Over-the-counter drugs such as cold and cough medicines, antihistamines, anti-nausea or motion sickness medications, pain relievers, decongestants and diuretics can cause drowsiness or dizziness, impairing a driver's reflexes and abilities.

Some drugs may make you feel alert and confident behind the wheel. However the effects may be quite the opposite. Drugs can give a false sense of control while impairing driving ability.

Below is a partial list of legal drugs that, in the right amount, can impair your ability to drive:

- Anti-anxiety medications
- Amphetamines
- Barbiturates
- Stimulants
- Narcotic pain medications
- Allergy medicines
- Blood sugar medications
- Antidepressants
- Tranquilizers
- Blood pressure medications
- Motion sickness medications
- Ulcer medications
- Antibiotics
- Anti-seizure medications
- Paregoric
- Anti-nausea medications
- Sedatives
- Cough syrups
- Alcohol-containing medicines
- Caffeine-containing medicines
- Decongestants

To avoid harming yourself or others, consult with your physician and pharmacist to understand the side effects of your medications and which drug combinations are safe—especially when driving. Never exceed the prescribed dose or take someone else's medication. If you are a professional driver, ask for non-sedating alternatives when possible. Allow your body time to adjust to new medications before getting behind the wheel. Most importantly, we are all responsible for recognizing the signs of drug impairment before driving any vehicle.

For more information on drug side effects, visit: www.drugs.com

What medications disqualify a CMV driver?

<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/faq/what-medications-disqualify-cmv-driver>

Can a CMV driver be disqualified for using a legally prescribed drug?

<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/faq/can-cmv-driver-be-disqualified-using-legally-prescribed-drug>

You can access 21 CFR 1308.11 (Controlled Substance Schedule I) at http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=fb0b4afcff84aef52755d6dff7b8880d&node=se21.9.1308_111&rgn=div8

For further assistance, please contact the FMCSA's Physical Qualifications Division at fmcsamedical@fmcsa.dot.gov or [\(202\) 366-400](tel:(202)366-400)

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