

National Sleep Foundation's 2026 Drowsy Driving Report

Technology, Policy, and Public Readiness for Action



The state of drowsy driving: it's time for action

Drowsy driving remains a major public health and safety issue in the United States. More than 1 in 5 crash-related fatalities are linked to drowsy driving. That means thousands of people die each year from this preventable form of driver impairment. Many in the United States have likely experienced some level of impact from drowsy driving, whether it has directly affected them or their loved ones. It's everyone's responsibility to help prevent drowsy driving, starting with getting enough quality sleep to be alert behind the wheel. The best way to avoid drowsy driving is to Sleep First. Drive Alert.®

Many U.S. adults continue to drive while drowsy, and most don't reliably recognize the signs that they're too tired to be behind the wheel. Each year, NSF surveys Americans about drowsy driving beliefs, awareness, and behaviors. For the first time, the 2026 survey asked Americans how ready they are for vehicle technology and policy to help prevent drowsy driving.

THE DRIVING PROBLEM

PREVALENCE

61% of adult U.S. drivers (about 145M+ people) have driven while drowsy at least once - and nearly 35M do it at least monthly.

AWARENESS GAP

~40% don't recognize even basic warning signs: blinking, head-nodding, and lane drift.

IN-VEHICLE TECH: AWARENESS VS. TRUST

TECH FAMILIARITY

58–67% are familiar with in-vehicle alertness, collision, and pedestrian detection systems.

PRIVACY CONCERN

62% worry that data from alertness-monitoring systems could be misused.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR POLICY & MANDATES

OUTRIGHT BAN

39% say drowsy driving should be illegal outright; 43% have no opinion either way.

HARM-BASED BAN

62% favor making drowsy driving illegal specifically when it results in a serious injury or fatal crash.

MANDATORY IN-CABIN TECH

34% support requiring driver-alertness technology in all new vehicles.

DRIVER EDUCATION

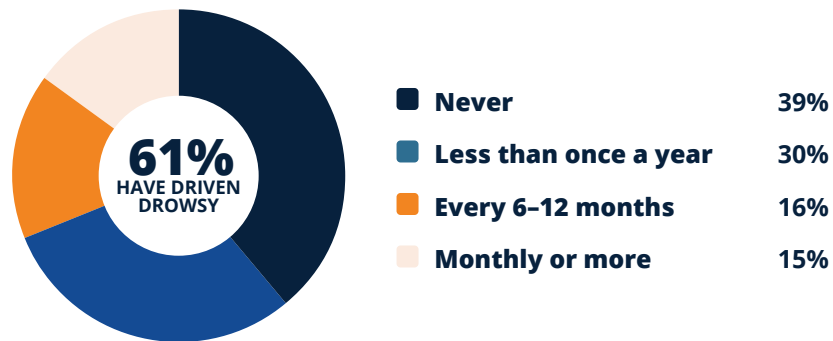
34% support requiring sleep and drowsy driving education as part of licensing.

Sleep health, vehicle technology, and policy have to work together — that's the throughline of the 2026 results, and it's the same coordinated approach NSF calls for in our [Position Statement on Drowsy Driving Prevention](#).

Millions of adults still drive drowsy often

Every year since 2022, NSF has asked U.S. adults whether they've ever gotten behind the wheel too tired to stay alert. **The answer has held steady at roughly six in ten**—even as our research has widened its lens from general prevalence to teens, to behavior gaps, to family dynamics, to public readiness for policy and technology. To reduce drowsy driving, more concerted, coordinated efforts are needed: from priorities set for health and safety, to policies, to daily practices.

Over six in ten adults (61%) or about 145M+ people, have driven while so tired they had trouble keeping their eyes open, and 15% do so monthly or more. The 2026 figure tracks closely with NSF's 2022 (62%) and 2025 (60%+) estimates. This is a stable, persistent pattern. More can be done to help drivers understand the importance of getting the sleep they need to be fit to drive and take measures to reduce their risk of fall-asleep crashes.



The “monthly-or-more” group alone represents an estimated **nearly 35 million adults**, and the every 6-12 months group adds nearly **40 million more**. That 15% “monthly-or-more” figure lines up with a pattern NSF has tracked for years: **roughly 1 in 5 adults who have ever driven drowsy** do so at least monthly — a rate that has held steady across NSF's surveys. Let's repeat that for emphasis: **over 72 million adult drivers in the U.S., or 1/3 of the adult driving population has driven while drowsy multiple times a year.**

Who's most at risk

- Younger and older adults
- Parents with children at home

Who's at lower risk

- Women and more-educated adults
- Midlife adults

4 in 10 adults miss the basic signs of drowsy driving

Adults were asked about five common physical and behavioral warning signs of dangerous sleepiness behind the wheel. Across all these signs, only about 60% correctly identified each, meaning a lot of drivers don't reliably know their own body's key clues.

- Frequent blinking or heavy eyelids
- Trouble keeping the head up / nodding off
- Repeated yawning
- Trouble focusing on the road
- Drifting from a lane or hitting a rumble strip

Are You in the Recommended Range?

Most adults need **7-9 hours** of quality sleep a night. Getting enough quality sleep is essential to helping prevent drowsy driving. If you haven't gotten enough sleep, you may not be fit to drive.

About 4 in 10 adults don't recognize the 5 Common Signs



Adults in **midlife** consistently recognize more signs than younger or older adults — likely from cumulative driving experience. Higher-education adults identify more signs; women recognize certain cues more than men.

New for 2026: what Americans say about in-vehicle safety technology

For the first time, NSF asked adults about driver monitoring systems, collision-prevention tech, and pedestrian detection, their familiarity, real-world use, trust, and if they would pay for it.

FAMILIARITY WITH VEHICLE TECH THAT CAN



HAVE USED IT

31%

have used alertness monitoring tech; 20% are unsure.

TRUST IT

61%

are confident the tech can help prevent drowsy driving crashes.

WORRY ABOUT IT

62%

worry the data collected could intrude on personal privacy.

PAY FOR IT

18%

would pay more for a vehicle with this technology; half would not.

Who's most familiar

- **Midlife adults and adults with higher education** report more familiarity and use across all three technology types above — likely tied to newer vehicles and driving frequency.
- **Men** report slightly higher familiarity than women.
- **Adults without children at home** report somewhat higher familiarity with alertness-monitoring systems specifically.

62% of adults think drowsy driving should be illegal when serious harm enters the picture

Americans are split on the legality of drowsy driving before considering if a crash from sleepiness causes serious injury or death. NSF sees a gap in how the public treats drowsy driving compared with other forms of impaired driving.

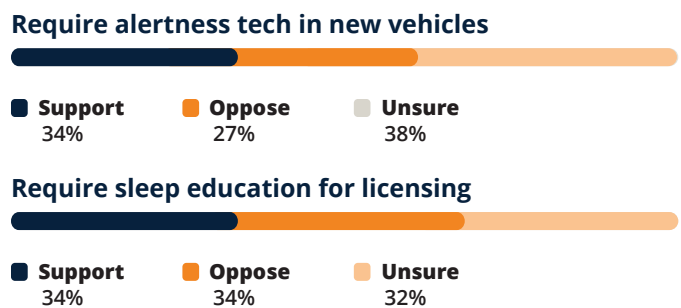
1 Legal Consequences

Punishing drowsy driving after it happens



2 Proactive Practices

Mandating tech and education before a crash occurs



Among the 61% who said no or were unsure on legal consequences, opinion shifts when harm is involved: **37%** would support making it illegal if it causes serious injury or death. Combined with initial support, **62%** of adults ultimately favor illegality in at least some circumstances.

What's missing from the headline numbers: unlike drunk and drugged driving which are illegal in every state, drowsy driving still isn't treated with the same consistency across law, education, or everyday practice.

Who's most supportive

- **Midlife adults** are consistently more supportive of making drowsy driving illegal and of requiring detection systems or sleep education in licensing.
- **Women** are slightly more supportive than men of legal consequences and technology requirements.

Sleep health, technology, and policy must work together

Drowsy driving remains a widespread, preventable, and underrecognized form of impaired driving. Tens of millions of adults are estimated to continue to drive drowsy with concerning regularity, and roughly four in ten still don't recognize the most basic signs of dangerous sleepiness behind the wheel. Let's start by improving people's prioritization of getting sufficient, quality sleep.

At the same time, 2026 marks a shift: most Americans are already familiar with vehicle safety technologies, many trust it to help, and a majority now favor legal consequences for drowsy driving when it causes serious harm. The barriers that remain, including privacy concerns and cost are ones NSF, automakers, and policymakers can address together with increased education and clearer public communication.

Midlife adults, who balance work, caregiving, and heavy driving demands, consistently show the greatest familiarity with warning signs and technology, plus are open to changes to policy. Parents, younger drivers, and older drivers face the greatest combination of risk.

NSF'S CALL TO ACTION

Coordinated action across drivers, educators, policymakers, employers, industry, and public health leaders — as outlined in NSF's [*Position Statement on Drowsy Driving Prevention*](#).

Drowsy driving is a deadly, preventable form of impaired driving. The public is showing more signs of readiness for technology and policy to play a role in preventing drowsy driving even as adoption and willingness to pay still lag behind general awareness.

Research methodology and approach

Findings are drawn from nationally representative, population-based surveys fielded by Ipsos Public Affairs KnowledgePanel®, weighted via iterative proportional fitting (raking) to match U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey benchmarks for sex by age, race/ethnicity, education, region, household income, and language proficiency.

1 Prevalence, Awareness, and Technology

Population	2,145 adults (18+), oversampled for Black and Hispanic adults, and parents of young children
Dates of data collection	September 17 – October 5, 2025
Margin of sampling error	±2.7 points (incl. design effects)

2 Perspectives on Drowsy Driving

Population	1,372 adults (18+), oversampled for Black and Hispanic adults
Dates of data collection	September 19–30, 2024
Margin of sampling error	±2.9 points (incl. design effects)

Source for both surveys: Ipsos Public Affairs KnowledgePanel®.

A closer look at the data for readers who want the full story.

The preceding pages summarized the headline findings from NSF's 2026 Drowsy Driving Report. The pages that follow provide the fuller narrative: more context, deeper group-level analysis, and the reasoning behind what the numbers mean for prevention and impact. This section is designed for researchers, practitioners, advocates, and policymakers who want more than the headlines, including the nuances that matter most for translating findings and insights into action.

SECTION A

Prevalence of Drowsy Driving

How often, who, and what's changed since 2022

SECTION B

Awareness of Warning Signs

What people recognize — and the gap that remains

SECTION C

Vehicle Safety Technology

Familiarity, use, trust, privacy, and willingness to pay

SECTION D

Legal & Policy Approaches

Where Americans stand — and what shifts their views

A stable, persistent pattern continues for rates of drowsy driving

Over six in ten American adults (61%) report having driven while so tired they had difficulty keeping their eyes open. Within that group, 15% — nearly 35 million people — do so at least once a month, 16% (nearly 40 million people) do so every six months to a year, and 30% do so less often than once per year. Less than four in ten adults (39%) report never having driven while drowsy.

These 2026 estimates are broadly consistent with NSF's prior findings. In 2022, 62% of drivers reported having driven while too tired to stay alert, and in 2025 that share remained above 60%. Taken together, the 2026 results reinforce a stable pattern: while most adults rarely or never drive drowsy, a large number continues to do so with concerning regularity.

**Roughly
1 in 5 adults**

**who have ever driven
drowsy do so at least
monthly — a rate that
has held steady across
years of NSF's surveys.**

Who drives drowsy and how often

- **Younger and older adults** reported more frequent drowsy driving. Plausible explanations include less routine driving schedules, leaving more room for disrupted or insufficient sleep without the same daily accountability.
- **Adults in midlife** were more likely to report infrequent drowsy driving. This may reflect greater driving experience and more consistent routines rather than more available sleep time, since midlife adults also carry the heaviest work and caregiving loads. This is a nuance worth exploring in future waves.
- **Adults with children at home** were more likely to report drowsy driving across the more frequent categories, consistent with the sleep disruption and caregiving demands common in family households. This pattern has appeared across multiple NSF survey years.
- **Women and adults with higher education** were somewhat more likely to report infrequent drowsy driving, possibly reflecting greater awareness of risk or greater flexibility in daily scheduling.

These patterns reinforce that life stage, sleep opportunity, and daily responsibilities meaningfully shape drowsy driving risk and that prevention efforts must account for these structural differences, not just individual behavior.

HISTORICAL ANCHORS

2022

62% of Americans
have driven drowsy

2023

1.7M teen drivers
have driven drowsy

2025

parents with infants
and teens drove drowsy
at the highest rates.

CONTEXT

In 2024, NSF found adults were far less likely to change plans or seek alternative transportation to avoid drowsy driving than to avoid drunk driving — even though sleeping only 3–4 hours can impair driving in ways comparable to having a few drinks.

Knowing the danger and recognizing the signs are not the same thing

While many American adults can identify some of the physical and behavioral cues that signal dangerous sleepiness, the 2026 findings reveal a substantial gap in public awareness. For each of the most common warning signs, only about 60% of adults correctly recognized them as indicators of drowsy driving.

This means that roughly four in ten adults do not identify even these fundamental, commonsense warning signs of dangerous sleepiness behind the wheel. But even where drivers don't recognize or perceive these signals of impairment in the moment, everyone can start with this baseline knowledge: get the recommended amount of quality sleep before driving.

~40%
of adults do not recognize the most basic, visible signs of dangerous sleepiness — blinking, head-nodding, yawning, lane drift.

Who recognizes the signs and who doesn't

- **Adults in midlife** consistently recognized more warning signs than younger or older adults. Likely explanations include accumulated driving experience, greater firsthand exposure to their own sleepiness symptoms, and higher levels of health and safety awareness.
- **Adults with higher education levels** were more likely to identify several hallmark signs, though the survey did not capture why. Plausible factors include greater access to health information and more comprehensive driver education.
- **Women** were somewhat more likely than men to recognize certain behavioral cues, and adults without children at home were more likely to identify irritability as a warning sign.

These differences reinforce that gaps in understanding are shaped by lived experience, which underscores the need for targeted education efforts that reach groups with lower recognition rates, including younger drivers and those with less driving experience.

Familiarity and trust are established but privacy concerns and cost blunt adoption

Most American adults report familiarity with common vehicle safety technologies: in-vehicle systems that monitor driver alertness (58%), identify pedestrians and other vehicles (67%), and help prevent or mitigate collisions (66%). Consistent with other NSF technology research, privacy and cost remain common barriers to adoption.

USE

Three in ten adults (31%) report having used a vehicle equipped with technology designed to monitor driver alertness. About half say they have not, and one in five are unsure.

CONFIDENCE

Six in ten adults (61%) express confidence that alertness monitoring technology can help prevent drowsy driving crashes, even though many drivers have limited direct experience with it. Still, nearly four in ten remain uncertain or skeptical, underscoring the need for continued public communication about how these systems function and what they can and can't do.

PRIVACY

Nearly two-thirds of adults (62%) worry that information gathered by these systems could be used in ways that intrude on personal privacy. These concerns appear broadly shared across demographic groups which suggest that transparency and clear communication about data protections will be essential as these technologies become more widespread. Privacy is not a niche concern; it is a mainstream barrier.

WILLINGNESS TO PAY

Only 18% of adults say they are willing to spend more on a vehicle because it includes alertness-monitoring technology; half are not, and about a third are unsure. Cost remains a meaningful barrier even among those confident in the technology's safety benefits which points toward policy mechanisms (requirements, incentives, or standard-feature bundling) as potentially more effective than market demand alone.

Who's most familiar and why it matters

Across all three technologies above, adults in midlife and those with higher education reported greater familiarity and use, likely tied to newer vehicles, more frequent driving, and greater comfort with emerging technology. Gender differences were modest, with men reporting slightly higher familiarity. Adults without children at home were somewhat more familiar with driver monitoring systems specifically. These patterns suggest that as vehicle fleets turn over and newer models reach more drivers, familiarity and use will increase. Equity in access to newer, tech-equipped vehicles remains a relevant consideration.

Serious harm makes Americans support drowsy driving being illegal

If there were no harmful outcome, Americans' views are mixed with the highest proportion (43%) having no opinion, followed by 39% who believe it should be against the law, and just 18% who say it shouldn't.

Legal Consequences

Tragic consequences of drowsy driving, like serious bodily injury or a fatal crash, are what moves 62% of Americans to support drowsy driving being illegal.

Without acknowledging such outcomes, 43% of Americans report no opinion, 39% still believe it should be against the law, and just 18% say it shouldn't.

When initial support and the harm-conditional group are combined, approximately 62% of American adults ultimately favor making drowsy driving illegal in at least some circumstances — a majority, though a conditional one.

This pattern, strong conditional support that emerges once harm is introduced, is familiar from the history of seatbelt and drunk driving legislation. Public opinion often crystallizes around consequence, not risk alone.

Proactive Requirements

There was a mixed response to whether certain proactive measures would curb drowsy driving. Results showed that 34% would support legislation requiring driver alertness and distraction-detection systems in new vehicles with 27% opposed and 38% unsure. The support for mandatory sleep education in driver licensing was nearly identical with 34% in favor, 34% opposed, 32% unsure.

While Americans recognize the importance of sleep for safe driving, many remain uncertain about what formal actions should be taken to address the drowsy driving problem such as integrating sleep health principles into licensing requirements or vehicle standards. With one-third of respondents "unsure" about actions, there is a significant opportunity for education-driven efforts.

Group differences in policy support

- **Adults in midlife** were consistently more supportive of making drowsy driving illegal and of requiring alertness-detection systems or sleep education in licensing.
- **Women** were slightly more supportive than men of legal consequences and technology requirements.
- **Adults without children at home** were more likely to support legal consequences when drowsy driving results in serious harm.

Extended Conclusion

The 2026 Drowsy Driving Report reinforces a central truth that has emerged across years of NSF research: drowsy driving remains a widespread, preventable, and underrecognized form of impaired driving in the United States. A meaningful number of adults continue to drive drowsy with concerning regularity, and roughly four in ten do not recognize even the most fundamental warning signs of dangerous sleepiness behind the wheel; a gap that underscores the ongoing need for public education and communication of risk in a way that resonates with everyday people.

But the gap is deeper than communication alone. Some of the groups most resistant to stronger policy or practice changes may be responding to a real fear of disruptive personal consequences: the added burden of new education requirements at licensing, or a parent who loses a license (and with it, a job or caregiving capacity) after a drowsy driving arrest. Across the board, the public still does not treat drowsy driving with the same seriousness — in policy, education, or everyday practice — as it treats drunk, drugged, or distracted driving.

Sleep opportunity, life stage, and daily demands shape both drowsy driving behavior and the public's readiness to embrace solutions.

By combining these pillars, NSF will continue to advance the science, elevate public awareness, and champion evidence-based interventions to help both improve sleep health and reduce drowsy driving crashes to ensure a culture that recognizes drowsy driving for what it is: **a deadly form of impaired driving that can, and must, be prevented.**

NSF'S ROLE GOING FORWARD

As the nation's leading voice in public sleep health and safety, NSF plays a critical role in translating these insights into action. NSF's recently published [Position Statement on Drowsy Driving Prevention](#) calls for a coordinated, multi-sector approach that includes drivers, educators, policymakers, employers, industry, and public health leaders.

The 2026 findings affirm the urgency of that call. Healthy sleep remains a foundation of safe driving, but technology and policy can be meaningful pillars of a modern prevention strategy. The data show that many Americans are ready to engage with these solutions, even as others need clearer information and broader access.

NSF will continue to advance the science, elevate public awareness, and champion collaborative, evidence-based interventions to help reduce drowsy-driving-related crashes.

A COORDINATED PREVENTION VISION

- 1 Individual behavior:** healthy sleep habits as the primary prevention tool
- 2 Public education:** recognizing warning signs and understanding impairment
- 3 Technology:** driver monitoring and crash prevention systems as a safety layer
- 4 Policy and practice:** legal accountability and proactive requirements that establish norms and reinforce a culture of health and safety