

**Alcohol and Youth
Public Health and Safety Reality**

“We can no longer ignore what alcohol is doing to our children.”

U.S. Surgeon General Rear Admiral Kenneth Moritsugu, M.D.

National “Call to Action” to Prevent Underage Drinking

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Alcohol - an Addictive Drug

- Alcohol, an addictive drug, is the drug of choice of most teens, and the nation's greatest drug problem.
- The National Institutes of Medicine reports that more teens drink alcohol than use tobacco products or other illegal drugs.
- More than 12% of Americans age 18 to 20 are addicted to alcohol, the highest rate of any age group.
- It's estimated that 3 million teens are alcoholics, and several million more teens have a drinking problem so severe as to be incapable of self-management.
- Alcohol consumption is the leading cause of death among teens, killing 6.5 times as many teens as all other drugs combined.
- The National Centers for Disease Control reports that alcohol use is the 3rd-leading preventable cause of death in the U.S.
- Among medical researchers, there is near-unanimous consensus that the key to youth avoidance of the harmful consequences noted above is to delay the age of onset of drinking alcohol. The earlier teens begin drinking, the more likely they are to suffer adverse health consequences, including death, injury, permanent health damage, dependency or abuse.
- 95% of alcohol dependent adults began drinking as teens.

Average Age of Drinking Onset

- On average, a child takes their first drink of alcohol at age 12.
- The National Institutes of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism finds that age of first use of alcohol is a powerful predictor of lifetime alcohol abuse and dependence.
- Approximately 10% of 9- to 10-year olds have started drinking, and 40% of 8 to 10 year olds have tried alcohol.
- Nearly 33% of children begin drinking before age 13.
- Children who begin drinking before age 15 are 5 times more likely to suffer alcohol abuse or dependency problems during their lifetime than someone who delays the onset of drinking until age 21 or later. Nearly half will suffer from issues of abuse, dependency or alcoholism.
- The peak years for alcohol initiation are during the 7th and 8th grades.

Drinking Patterns of Teens

- According to the national Centers for Disease Control (CDC), binge drinking (5 or more drinks in one drinking episode) is a common drinking pattern of consumption among teen drinkers. 90% of alcohol consumption by teens occurs during binge periods.
- The CDC reports that 18 to 24-year old bingers average nearly 10 drinks per binge and four binges per month.
- Since 1975, binge drinking has tripled among females, and current research finds that females in the 12 to 17 age range are drinking more than males. Binge drinking poses unique health risks for females, including its link to breast cancer. According to the National Institutes of Health, 21% of 9th grade girls report binge drinking within the last month.

- By age 14, more than 50% of children who report use of alcohol in the past month also report having 5 or more drinks on a single occasion in that same month.
- Research finds that teens drink significantly greater quantities of alcohol than adults when consuming alcohol, and, to enhance their "high," often mix alcohol with prescriptive medications.
- 44% of collegiate drinkers are identified as binge drinkers.

Parental Awareness of and Influence on Teen Drinking

- National studies conclude that most parents have little or no awareness of the alcohol consumption patterns of their children. Studies find that teen drinkers drink often, drink excessively, and drink for the express purpose of achieving intoxication.
- A Mayo Clinic study finds parents consistently underestimate how early their children begin drinking; the amount of alcohol teens consume; and the dangers of teen alcohol consumption.
- Surveys find that most parents strongly oppose the use of controlled substances and tobacco products (likewise, addictive drugs) by their children, while finding it more challenging to voice similar strong opposition to alcohol usage.
- Each day, 7,000 more children under the age of 16 will take their first drink of alcohol.
- Among 8th grade girls (usually about age 13) who drink heavily, 37% report attempting suicide. One-third of all suicides are associated with alcohol misuse.
- A Penn State University study finds that children raised in drinking tolerant homes are more likely to become excessive drinkers as university students.
- A Wake Forest University study finds that children raised in zero-tolerance for underage drinking homes are statistically less likely to become excessive drinkers.
- Teens who are provided alcohol by their parents are three times more likely to binge drink than other age contemporaries.
- According to the 2008 Roper Youth Report, 74% of 8 to 17-year olds cite their parents as the Number 1 influence on whether they drink alcohol.
- With lax regulation, the alcohol industry now exploits new-media tools to reach the teen market, including online, offline, mobile, digital, music, video and social-networking platforms to reach this market demographic.

Health Dangers of Underage Drinking

- Studies find that abuse of alcohol on still-developing teen bodies can result in the permanent loss of up to 10% of brain power. Medical research concludes that, because of continuing development, the body is not biologically ready for alcohol consumption until about age 25.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics says that "alcohol use is extremely dangerous for youth," and urges pediatricians to work hard to discourage child and teen use of alcohol because of its damage to personal health, risk of addiction, and relationship to early death and serious injury. Alcohol is a significant factor in many teen suicides.
- Medical studies find that, in addition to brain damage, abuse of alcohol on still-developing teen bodies can result in permanent damage to other vital organs (including heart, liver, lungs, pancreas, and circulatory system) and cause growth dysfunction. Drinking alcohol during this period of rapid development and growth may upset the hormonal balance necessary for the normal development of organs, muscles, and bones. In addition, teen alcohol usage has been determined to cause DNA damage, along with major clinical depression.
- The medical journal Lancet reports that alcohol is causally-related to more than 60 medical conditions, including cancer, heart disease, liver cirrhosis, addiction, dependency, or alcohol poisoning.
- According to the National Cancer Center, young women who drink alcohol put themselves at higher risk of developing breast disease that is a known risk factor for cancer.
- Absorbing alcohol into the bloodstream more quickly while metabolizing it more slowly than males, studies find that females tend to become intoxicated faster and addicted to alcohol more quickly than males. Alarmingly, females tend to prefer alcohol products containing greater

alcohol content by volume than those chosen by males. Alcohol-dependent females tend to develop serious and potentially irreversible brain damage more quickly than males.

Safety Dangers of Underage Drinking

- 75% of date rapes involve alcohol as a factor, with alcohol considered the number one date rape drug. Alcohol is a significant factor in other non-date related rapes. For women, they are nine times more likely to experience sexual aggression on days of heavy alcohol consumption compared with days of no alcohol consumption.
- Alcohol is a strong catalyst and contributing factor in many high-risk youthful behaviors, including, but not limited to, violent crimes, suicide, vandalism, smoking, sexual behaviors, accidents of all sorts (involving both fatal and non-fatal injuries), poisonings and psychoses, and many other unwanted harmful or criminal results as consequence of the consumption of alcohol.
- 50% of all violent crime involves alcohol as a factor.

Teen Drinking and Driving

- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that alcohol-related crashes kill more people ages 16 to 20 than any other age group.
- Though unable to legally consume alcohol, 40% of all fatal teen car crashes involve alcohol.
- A USA Today survey reports 90% of 11th and 12th graders believe that their peers are more likely to drink and drive on prom night. Few teen respondents felt drinking and driving posed a high degree of risk.
- NHTSA reports that prom and graduation season is when most teen motor vehicle deaths and serious injury occur.
- 52% of teens admit to drinking and driving or riding with a driver who has been drinking.
- In a single year, 522 children under the age of 14 were arrested for driving while intoxicated. Of those, 113 were under the age of 10.
- A University of Michigan study finds alcohol incidents involving teens, including peer alcohol use, parental permissiveness toward teen alcohol use, susceptibility to peer pressure, and alcohol misuse are all predictors of crash involvement for teen drivers.

Cost of Underage Drinking

- It's estimated that it costs the nation annually in excess of \$62 billion in medical care and other costs related to teen drinking.
- Underage drinking costs North Carolina nearly \$1.4 billion annually. Fetal alcohol syndrome among mothers ages 15 to 20 costs North Carolina approximately \$24 million annually.
- The N.C. Institute of Medicine estimates that alcohol and drug abuse cost the North Carolina economy \$12.4 billion annually.
- The World Health Organization conservatively estimates that alcohol abuse costs the United States economy \$200 billion annually.

University Trends

- While binge drinking appears to be declining among 18 to 20-year old non-students, binge drinking among collegians appears to be increasing. Excessive drinking among this age group appears to be uniquely a long-standing product of college culture.
- University student deaths from underage drinking have reached their highest levels. Alcohol poisoning is at record level among collegians.

- Studies find that collegians often mix consumption of energy drinks with consumption of alcohol to enable longer periods of drinking. To accommodate this dangerous practice, the alcohol industry now markets sweet-flavored beverages containing a mixture of alcohol and caffeine.
- Alcohol blackouts, once thought to be a sign of advanced alcoholism, is commonly reported among college drinkers. In part, it is an indicator of their excessive consumption and destructive drinking habits.
- Drinking by 18 to 24-year old college students contributes to an estimated 1700 student deaths, 599,000 injuries, and 97,000 sexual assaults or date rapes annually. Nearly 700,000 students report being assaulted by other drinking students.
- 11% of drinking students admit participating in acts of vandalism while drinking, and 25% report drinking-related academic consequences.
- 90% of sexual assaults on collegiate women involve alcohol as a factor.
- Unintentional deaths from alcohol poisoning tripled between 1998 and 2005.

Access to Alcohol

- Unable to lawfully purchase alcohol, teens still account for nearly 25% of gross alcohol sales annually. Teens sales, while unhealthy for young people, represent a financial jackpot for the alcohol industry with approximately \$350 million in sales and \$170 million in profit to the industry in North Carolina.
- According to a study by the American Medical Association, more than 60% of 8th graders and over 80% of 10th graders said it is fairly easy or very easy to obtain alcohol.
- National studies confirm that the “family home” is a primary source of alcohol acquisition by teens.
- According to the National Research Council and Institutes of Medicine, 75% of 7th graders (usually about age 12) who drink alcohol obtain it from parents, with or without their knowledge.
- A study sponsored jointly by Liberty Mutual Insurance Company and Students Against Destructive Decisions finds that 36% of students report that their parents allowed them to attend parties where it was known that alcohol would be served.

Underage Drinking-A Possible Lifetime Consequence

- The abuse or misuse of alcohol by children can have lifelong consequences.
- Like the tobacco industry before it, current medical and scientific research confirms the potentially dangerous and lifelong consequences from underage drinking.
- According to a recent study by the National Institutes of Health, 53% of the identified alcoholics in America are young people, pre-teen to age 26. The vast majority began drinking as teens, most by age 15.

The Alcohol Industry, Social Messaging, and Youth

- According to a Georgetown University study, between 2001 and 2005, the alcohol industry, spending \$4.7 billion, placed more than 1.4 million alcohol ads on broadcast, cable and television media.
- Studies find that the alcohol industry specifically target teens with advertising. According to a recent study, the malt beverage industry, a particular teen favorite, increases advertising during periods of higher teen viewership.
- Despite calls for restraint in alcohol advertising from, among others, the American Medical Association and Federal Trade Commission, the industry increased advertising by 32%
- The Rand Corporation, in separate studies, finds that alcohol advertising does influence youth drinking. The American Academy of Pediatrics finds that alcohol advertising influences children to make bad choices about alcohol use, and calls for restraint have been unheeded by the industry.

- Despite the fact that it is illegal for 80 million underage Americans to use or consume their products, youth exposure to alcohol advertising continues to increase.
- Though the alcohol industry denies targeting youth, a Georgetown University finds that teens aged 12 to 19 rank ads for ***Bud Light*** as their favorite commercial advertisement.
- Like tobacco advertisements before it, teen girls are overwhelmed with advertising portraying drinking as glamorous and fashionable, significantly more so than males or older females. In addition, recognizing the preference of females for higher alcohol content products, the industry targets its message accordingly.
- The alcohol industry created and markets alcohol products, like alcopops and alcohol energy drinks, that are specifically aimed at teen consumers. Though the least favored alcoholic beverage among female adults, alcopops, (referred to as a "girlie" drink, cheerleader beer, alcoholic lemonade, pop juice, etc.) in particular, are heavily marketed at young girls. Alcopops are the beverage of choice for teen girls, and, according to the American Medical Association, are a significant contributor in the drinking gender reversal. Research finds most adults have no awareness of the existence of these products.
- The Marin Institute reports alcopops-related harm to North Carolina exceeds \$207 million.

Start Talking Before Kids Start Drinking

- Studies find that parents are the most influential people in the life of their child, and that children want clear instruction from parents about alcohol use.
- A survey released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services finds an astounding 96% of adult Americans are concerned about underage drinking; 92% favor stronger local restrictions and enforcement; and 89% favor stronger restrictions on college campuses to reduce teen drinking.
- A clear and unequivocal message from parents to children about alcohol usage is critical in preventing underage drinking. When parents don't talk with their children regarding alcohol usage, the most influential messaging will come from the alcohol industry or other youth.
- Studies find that most children who do not use alcohol make that choice so as not to disappoint parents or lose their trust.
- The U.S. Surgeon General contends that parents should begin communicating non-use alcohol positions with children as soon as they can comprehend ideas.

“Maximizing the potential of every child is what the prevention of underage drinking is about. With the rapidly emerging medical and scientific findings related to the potentially lifelong harm from underage drinking, parents and other adults have more reason than ever to declare clear and unequivocal opposition to underage drinking. For teens, there is no such thing as a harmless drink.”

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