



# UNDERAGE DRINKING FACTS

## Alcohol is the Leading Drug Problem Among Youth

- Alcohol is the leading drug problem among youth.
- There are approximately 9.7 million underage drinkers in the United States. (25% of the population 12 – 20 years old).
- In 2011, 3.8 million youth under age 21 drank alcohol for the first time, this averages to 10,700 new drinkers per day under age 21. For those under age 18, 2.9 million drank for the first time, averaging 7,900 initiates per day.
- For those who first used alcohol under age 21 in 2011, the average age of first use was 15.9 years.
- Nearly 6.1 million (15.8%) underage drinkers are considered binge drinkers and more than 1.7 million (4.4%) are classified as heavy drinkers.

*National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2011*

## Sources of alcohol for underage youth

According to the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, among current underage drinkers:

- 57% reported last use of alcohol in the past month occurred in someone else's home and 28.2% reported use in their own home
- 30.3% paid for the alcohol the last time they drank
  - 7.7% purchased the alcohol themselves
  - 22.4% who gave money to someone else to purchase it
- Among underage drinkers who did not pay for the alcohol the last time they drank:
  - 38.2% obtained it from an unrelated person aged 21 or older
  - 21.4% obtained it from parents, guardians, or other adult family members
  - 19.1% obtained it from other underage persons
  - 5.9% took the alcohol from home
  - 3.9% took it from someone else's home
  - 6.8% obtained it some other way



## Underage Alcohol Use is Associated with Risky Behavior

- On average, underage drinkers drink more when they drink, consuming more drinks per drinking occasion than adult drinkers.<sup>1</sup>
  - Although drinking by persons under the age of 21 is illegal, people aged 12 to 20 years drink 11% of all alcohol consumed in the United States.<sup>3</sup> More than 90% of this alcohol is consumed in the form of binge drinks.<sup>2</sup>
- Early drinkers were more likely than nondrinkers to report academic problems, substance use, and delinquent behavior in both middle school and high school. By young adulthood, early alcohol use was associated with employment problems, other substance abuse, and criminal and violent behavior.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2011, underage drinkers were more likely than current alcohol users aged 21 or older to use illicit drugs within 2 hours of alcohol use on their last reported drinking occasion (20.1% vs. 4.9%, respectively). The most commonly reported illicit drug used by underage drinkers in combination with alcohol was marijuana, which was used within 2 hours of alcohol use by 19.2% of current underage drinkers (1.8 million persons) on their last drinking occasion.<sup>4</sup>
- An estimated 5.2% of 16 or 17 year olds and 13.5% of 18 to 20 year olds reported driving under the influence of alcohol in the past year.<sup>5</sup>
- Underage drinking plays a significant role in increased sexual behavior, including unwanted, unintended and unprotected sexual activity, and sex with multiple partners.<sup>6</sup>
- In a study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation:<sup>7</sup>
  - 23% (5.6 million) of sexually active teens and young adults ages 15-24 in the United States reported having had unprotected sex because they were drinking or using drugs at the time.
  - 24% of teens ages 15-17 said that their alcohol and drug use led them to do more sexually than they had planned.
- Teen girls who binge drink are 63% more likely to get pregnant while in their teen years.<sup>8</sup>

## Alcohol's Impact on Athletic Performance

- Athletes who drink are twice as likely to become injured.<sup>9</sup>
- The associated residual effect of the alcoholic hangover has been shown to reduce aerobic performance by 11.4%.<sup>10</sup>
- Alcohol is known to slow down one's ability to react to an opponent or object 72 hours following alcohol intake. Precision, equilibrium, hand-eye coordination, judgment, ability to process information, focus, stamina, strength, power, and speed are all negatively affected for many hours after blood alcohol levels return to 0.0%.<sup>11</sup>

## The Consequences of Underage Drinking are Real and Tragic

- Underage drinking is the leading contributor of death from injuries. Annually, about 5,000 people under 21 die from alcohol-related injuries.<sup>12</sup>
- Each year, approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking; this includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 as a result of homicides, 300 from suicide, as well as hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings.<sup>13</sup>
- In 2010, there were approximately 189,000 emergency rooms visits by persons under age 21 for injuries and other conditions linked to alcohol.<sup>14</sup>
- Youth who drink alcohol are more likely to experience physical problems including hangovers, illness and alcohol poisoning, memory problems, disruption of normal growth and sexual development, among others negative effects.<sup>15</sup>
- Research has found a strong link between past alcohol use and past suicide attempt(s) and between past binge drinking and past suicidal behavior and ideation.<sup>16</sup>
- Youth who begin drinking before age 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol dependence or abuse alcohol later in life, than those who begin drinking at or after age 21.<sup>17</sup>
- 40% of children who start drinking before the age of 15 will become alcoholics at some point in their lives.<sup>18</sup>
- When drinking is delayed until age 21, a child's risk of serious alcohol problems is decreased by 70 percent.<sup>19</sup>
- Studies reveal that alcohol consumption by adolescents results in brain damage - possibly permanent - and impairs intellectual development. Alcohol use prior to age 21 impairs crucial aspects of youthful brain functioning. In a study, heavy-drinking adolescents who had been sober for three weeks still scored 10 percent lower than non-drinking peers on tests requiring verbal and nonverbal recall and skills needed for map reading, geometry, and science.<sup>20</sup>
- If alcohol is heavily consumed in adolescence, the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory can shrink by about ten percent.<sup>21</sup>
- Among high school dropouts, 32.3% reported engaging in binge drinking, compared with 23.8% of those who remained in school. For the dropouts, the rate of past-month drinking was 41.6%, versus 35.3% among their peers who were still in school.<sup>22</sup>
- A study that followed over 6,500 individuals found that, by the age of 23, those who were drinkers by seventh grade were:
  - more likely to be substance-users,
  - between 1.7 and 2.3 times more likely to be weekly or binge drinkers, exhibit signs of alcohol dependence, and experience multiple alcohol problems,
  - more likely to engage in criminal and violent behavior, and
  - more likely than non-drinkers to have "missed work for no good reason".<sup>23</sup>



## Parents CAN make a difference!

- 86% of parents support laws that make it illegal for parents to allow teens other than their own to drink alcohol in their home.<sup>24</sup>
- Compared to teens whose parents would not let their child attend a party where alcohol was going to be served, teens whose parents would let them go (whether or not the parents imposed any conditions) are:
  - Twice as likely to have tried tobacco (18% vs. 9%);
  - Two and a half times likelier to have tried alcohol (46% vs. 17%); and
  - Two and a half times likelier to have tried marijuana (23% vs. 9%).<sup>25</sup>
- Parents' approval of alcohol use is highly correlated with youth drinking behavior.<sup>26</sup>
  - Teens were twice as likely to binge drink and use alcohol within a 30-day period if their parents or friends' parents provided alcohol at their homes for a party.
  - Parents who set strict consequences for breaking the house rules regarding drinking can help prevent underage drinking.
- Adolescents do listen to their parents when it comes to issues such as drinking and smoking, particularly if the messages are conveyed consistently and with authority.<sup>27</sup>
- Whether teens defer to parents on the issue of drinking is statistically linked to how parents parent. Specifically, authoritative parents—those who provide a healthy and consistent balance of discipline and support—are the most likely to have teenagers who respect the boundaries they have established around drinking and other behaviors; whereas adolescents exposed to permissive, authoritarian, or neglectful parenting are less influenced by what their parents say about drinking.<sup>28</sup>
- Research suggests that, regardless of parenting styles, adolescents who are aware that their parents would be upset with them if they drank are less likely to do so, highlighting the importance of communication between parents and teens as a protective measure against underage alcohol use.<sup>29</sup>



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- <sup>1</sup> Bonnie RJ and O'Connell ME, editors. *National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility. Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2004.*
- <sup>2</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *Drinking in America: Myths, Realities, and Prevention Policy* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> P.L. Ellickson, PhD, J.S. Tucker, PhD, and D.J. Klein, MS. (2003) *Ten-Year Prospective Study of Public Health Problems Associated With Early Drinking. Pediatrics Vol. 111 No. 5, pp. 949 -955.*
- <sup>4</sup> *National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2011.*
- <sup>5</sup> *National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2011*
- <sup>6</sup> C. Poulin and L. Graham (2001). *The association between substance use, unplanned sexual intercourse and other sexual behaviours among adolescent students. Addiction Volume 96, Issue 4, pages 607–621.*
- <sup>7</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, *Millions of Young People Mix Sex with Alcohol or Drugs - With Dangerous Consequences*, 6 February 2002
- <sup>8</sup> *The effects of minimum legal drinking ages on teen childbearing. The Journal of Human Resources, 36(4), 2001.*
- <sup>9</sup> Lyons FP. *Can regular alcohol consumption increase the risk of injury [thesis]? Exeter: University of Exeter, 1998*
- <sup>10</sup> O'Brien CP. *Alcohol and sport: impact of social drinking on recreational and competitive sports performance. SportsMed 1993; 15 (2): 71-7*
- <sup>11</sup> L. Burke. (1995) *The Complete Guide to Food for Sports Performance (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Sydney: Allen and Unwin.*
- <sup>12</sup> *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking, 2007*
- <sup>13</sup> NIAAA *Alcohol Alert, Number 67, January 2006.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. The DAWN Report: Highlights of the 2010 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Findings on Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits. Rockville, MD; 2012.*
- <sup>15</sup> *National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2008*
- <sup>16</sup> M. Schaffer, E.L. Jeglic, B. Stanley (2008) *The relationship between suicidal behavior, ideation, and binge drinking among college students. Archives of Suicide Research 12(2):124-32.*
- <sup>17</sup> *National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2008*
- <sup>18</sup> B.F. Grant, (1998). NIAAA's *Epidemiologic Bulletin No. 39 The Impact of a Family History of Alcoholism on the Relationship Between Age at Onset of Alcohol Use and DSM-IV Alcohol Dependence. Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey, Alcohol Health and Research World 22(2).*
- <sup>19</sup> *Calculated from information contained in: Grant BF, Dawson DA. 1997, Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence. Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. Journal of Substance Abuse 9:103-110.*
- <sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Bernice Wuetrich, "Getting Stupid," *Discover 22 no. 3 (March 2001)*; S.A. Brown, S.F. Tapert, E. Granholm, D.C. Delis, "Neurocognitive Functioning of Adolescents: Effects of Protracted Alcohol Use," *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research 24, no. 2 (Feb 2000): 164-171*
- <sup>21</sup> M.D. De Bellis, M.D.; D.B. Clark, M.D., Ph.D.; S.R. Beers, Ph.D.; P.H. Soloff, M.D.; A.M. Boring, B.S.; J. Hall, B.A.; A. Kersh, B.A.; M.S. Keshavan, M.D. (2000) *Hippocampal Volume in Adolescent-Onset Alcohol Use Disorders. American Journal of Psychiatry;157:737-744.*

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<sup>22</sup> SAMHSA. (February 12, 2013). *The NSDUH Report: Substance Use among 12th Grade Aged Youths by Dropout Status*. From <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k13/NSDUH036/SR036SubstanceUseDropouts.htm> (accessed July 25, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> P.L. Ellickson, J.S. Tucker, D.J. Klein, "Ten-Year Prospective Study of Public Health Problems Associated With Early Drinking," *Pediatrics* 111, no. 5 (May 2003): 949-955.

<sup>24</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. *National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XV: Teens and Parents, August 2010*.

<sup>25</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. *National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XV: Teens and Parents, August 2010*.

<sup>26</sup> K.L. Foley, D. Altman, R.H. Durant, M. Wolfson. *Adults' approval and adolescents' alcohol use*. *J Adolesc Health*. 2004 Oct;35(4):345.e17-26.

<sup>27</sup> C. Jackson. *Perceived legitimacy of parental authority and tobacco and alcohol use during early adolescence*. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 31(5):425-432, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> C. Jackson. *Perceived legitimacy of parental authority and tobacco and alcohol use during early adolescence*. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 31(5):425-432, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> K.L. Foley, D. Altman, R.H. Durant, M. Wolfson. *Adults' approval and adolescents' alcohol use*. *J Adolesc Health*. 2004 Oct;35(4):345.e17-26.