

THE FACTS - DID YOU KNOW...?

Alcohol is the drug of choice among youth. Many young people are experiencing the consequences of drinking too much, at too early an age. As a result, underage drinking is a leading public health problem in this country. Underage drinking can be dangerous and lead to other high risk behaviors, including drug use.

- Research shows that alcohol drinking is widespread among adolescents. For example, 2002 data from Monitoring the Future (MTF), an annual survey of U.S. youth, show that more than three-fourths of 12th graders, two-thirds of 10th graders, and nearly half of 8th graders have drunk alcohol at some point in their lives. And when youth drink, they tend to drink heavily. Underage drinkers between the ages of 12 and 17 consume on average 4 to 5 drinks per occasion, about 5 times a month. By comparison, adult drinkers aged 26 and older consume on average 2 to 3 drinks per occasion, about 9 times a month.
- When youth drink they tend to drink intensively, often consuming four to five drinks at one time. MonitoringTF data show that 11 percent of 8th graders, 22 percent of 10th graders, and 29 percent of 12th graders had engaged in heavy episodic, or binge, drinking within the past two weeks. For more information, refer to:
http://monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/vol1_2005.pdf.
- Underage drinking can result in a range of adverse short-and long-term consequences, including academic and/or social problems; physical problems such as hangovers or illnesses; unwanted, unintended, and unprotected sexual activity; physical and sexual assault; memory problems; increased risk of suicide and homicide; alcohol-related car crashes and other unintentional injuries such as burns, falls, and drownings; and death from alcohol poisoning.
**National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism National Institutes of Health
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>
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- 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 (**For references, see NIAAA's publication Alcohol Alert No. 67, Underage Drinking**).

THE FACTS - DID YOU KNOW...?

- Data from NIAAA's 2001-2002 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC), a survey of 43,000 U.S. adults, showed that early alcohol use, independent of other risk factors, may contribute to the risk of developing future alcohol problems. Those who began drinking in their early teens were at greater risk of developing alcohol dependence at some point in their lives, and they were also at greater risk of developing dependence more quickly and at younger ages. **The findings were reported in the journal Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, Volume 160, pages 739-746.**

On January 24, 2008, the Montclair Times sited the following statistics by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence:

- 23.6% of 8th grade students in NJ have used alcohol in the past 30 days.
- 12% of the States 7th graders have used alcohol in the past 30 days.
- 11.5% of 7th graders and 14.5 % of 8th graders had their first drink of alcohol (more than a few sips) before the age of 11 and 20.1% of high school students drank before they were 13.
- 27.9% of New Jersey's 7th and 8th graders who used alcohol in the past 30 days got F's.

WHY KIDS USE

There are a variety of social, emotional, physical and environmental factors that contribute to this question. A recent article in the Montclair Times cited four main reasons teens interviewed gave for drinking, social appeal, the loss of inhibitions, feeling more mature and less commonly, getting drunk.

People in general use substances for a variety of reasons, such as self-medication, social anxiety/relaxation, peer use, dependence, or boredom.

WHY KIDS USE - continued

- **Self Esteem issues leading to Self-medication:** More than 11 million children suffer from depression at any given point in time. Kids under stress, who experience loss, or who have attention disorders, are at higher risk for depression. Depression also tends to run in families. Depressed teens may be more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs as a way to feel better.
- **Social anxiety/ Peer Use:** Teens want others to like them. Sometimes the group they want to join is using, or the teen thinks the group is using. Sometime kids turn to alcohol and other drugs to feel like they fit in, to overcome anxiety, change their personality, or give themselves courage to talk to other people. For some teens, wanting to fit in and belong is the most important part of growing up.
- **Boredom/Curiosity:** For teens, there is a curiosity that is associated with alcohol and other substances. Even with all of the educational information provided outlining the risks, a number of them remain innately curious. Kids seem to also find out a lot about substances from unreliable sources. Kids are smart and they are very quick to pick up mixed messages in the media, at school or at the dinner table.

WHY KIDS SHOULDN'T USE

Most information taken from www.ncadi.samhsa.gov/govpubs/rpo992

There are obvious and some not so obvious reasons why kids should not use alcohol and other substances. Some parents take the position that kids are going to drink no matter what parents do and they would rather have them learn how to drink now than at college. Some parents believe that they can teach “responsible drinking” when they provide alcohol to their own children and perhaps their friends, but take away their car keys. This mixed message not only breaks the law, but misleads kids into thinking any drinking without driving is safe. Here are some of the other dangers of underage drinking:

- **Drinking can damage Self-Respect** - Teens need to pay attention to ways in which alcohol might cause them to do something embarrassing that might damage their self-respect and important relationships.
- **Drinking impacts the ability to learn** - A lower dosage of alcohol will damage a young brain compared to a fully matured brain, and young brains are damaged more quickly. Alcohol exposure during adolescence is linked with a reduced ability to learn compared with those not exposed until adulthood.

WHY KIDS SHOULDN'T USE - continued

- High School students who use alcohol or other substances are five times more likely than other students to drop out of school or to believe that earning good grades is not important.

- **Underage Drinking is illegal** - Alcohol use under the age of 21 is illegal; getting caught may mean trouble with authorities, for both parents and underage children. Even if getting caught doesn't lead to police action, the parents of your child's friends may no longer permit them to associate with your child. If drinking occurs on school grounds, your child will be suspended. *See the Consequences section for more details.*

- **Drinking can be dangerous** - In 1997, 21% of the young drivers 15-20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.
- In a high percentage of serious crimes, alcohol is found in the offender, the victim, or both, and alcohol-related problems are disproportionately found in both juvenile and adult offenders.
- Approximately 240,000-360,000 of the Nation's 12 million current undergraduates will ultimately die from alcohol related causes.

- **Drinking Is Unhealthy**
- A 2005 study by the National Institutes of Health revealed that the frontal lobes (of the brain), which allow people to evaluate the risks and consequences of their actions, are not fully developed until the age of 25. The study showed that up to age 25 there is still actual division of cells...The effect alcohol can have on those cells while they're in a formative stage is very significant. (*Montclair Times 1/28/08*).
- People who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who wait until 21.
- Adolescents who drink heavily assume the same long-term health risks as adults who drink heavily (liver cirrhosis, stroke, cancer).
- Adolescents who use alcohol are more likely to become sexually active at an earlier age and to engage in unprotected sex.
- One study showed that students diagnosed with alcohol abuse were four times more likely to experience major depression than those without an alcohol problem.
- Studies show that addiction is hereditary and, the earlier and more you consume increase your chances of developing such a disease. If one or more of your immediate family or extended family members has suffered from alcoholism, your child may be somewhat more vulnerable to developing a drinking problem. Your child needs to know that for him or her, drinking may carry special risks.