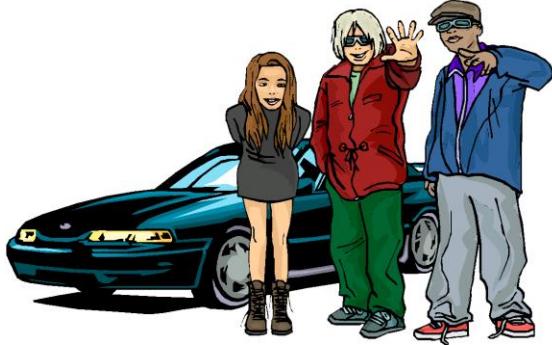


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DRINKING AND DRIVING – FACTS FOR TEENS



Ah, the thrill of getting your first driver's license, of getting behind the wheel of your first car. You enjoy the independence of getting where you need to go. But with driving comes new responsibilities and unforeseen circumstances that may be dangerous – especially if you bring alcohol or other drugs into the picture.

Did you know that young drivers make up 6.9 percent of the total driving population, but constitute 13 percent of the alcohol-involved drivers in fatal crashes? The three leading causes of death for 15- to 24-year-olds are automobile crashes, homicides

and suicides -- alcohol is a leading factor in all three.

Ideally, youth would wait until the legal drinking age to experiment with alcohol (21 years old). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Even though alcohol kills teens in many different ways (automobile crashes, alcohol poisoning, homicides, suicides), many youth choose to use alcohol. This is a dilemma, especially since alcohol kills 6.5 times more youth than all other illicit drugs combined.

Why Alcohol Affects Driving

Alcohol is a depressant, a drug that slows down the central nervous system, including the brain. Soon after drinking, alcohol enters the brain. Small amounts of alcohol affect the cerebrum, the area of the brain that controls thinking and judgment. The drinker is less able to make sensible decisions, and is more likely to take risks. Vision is affected, especially night vision and the ability to see clearly. If the person drinks larger amounts, the alcohol also enters the cerebellum, the area of the brain that controls the muscles. Reflexes are slowed, and the driver cannot react as quickly or accurately. Balance, coordination, and stability are affected. Depth perception (judgment of distance) is impaired, and vision becomes more blurred, especially peripheral (side) vision. If the person drinks more, the alcohol reaches the area of the brain that controls vital functions, such as the heartbeat and breathing. Drinking large amounts of alcohol causes unconsciousness and sometimes death from alcohol poisoning. (1)

Some Facts to Consider

- More than 35% of all deaths of 16 to 20 year olds result from motor vehicle crashes. Estimates are that 2,125 (36.1%) persons aged 16-20 died in alcohol-related crashes in 1999.
- Youth who drink alcohol are 7.5 times more likely to use any illicit drug, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than young people who never drink alcohol.
- During a typical weekend, an average of one teenager (ages 15-20) dies each hour in a car crash. More than forty- five percent of those crashes involved alcohol. (2)

The greatest cost of DUI is the 28,000+ lives lost every year in alcohol and drug-related car crashes. That's enough destruction to wipe out a small city, at the rate of three citizens an hour.

(over)

Imagine all those people - roughly the population of Kirkwood in St. Louis County, Missouri, are destroyed - wiped off the face of the earth. You'd pay attention to any weapon that can cause that kind of damage, so think about it!

YOU can be that weapon anytime you drive after drinking. You could hurt yourself, an innocent bystander, or someone you love.

You Use – You Lose:

Driving is the ultimate statement of independence for a teenager. But having a driver's license is a privilege that brings with it responsibility. In Missouri, drivers under 21 who are caught with alcohol or drugs in their systems face serious consequences.

Under the "**Use it & Lose it**" zero tolerance law, **drivers under age 21 with any trace of alcohol in their systems will lose their driving privileges.** Persons under 21 can also be charged with a DUI if they have a BAC over .08, any drugs in their systems, or other indications of impaired driving.

A zero tolerance offense involves administrative penalties. A DUI conviction involves administrative and criminal penalties and will result in both the revocation of the driver's license and the suspension of vehicle registration privileges.

Bottom Line:

- **Drive sober.** Alcohol and drugs are illegal, slow your reactions and distort reality by making make you think you're an awesome driver. Bad Combination!
- **Ride with sober drivers.** If you're riding with a driver who has been drinking or doing drugs, you're also in danger, because 48 percent of people who die in car crashes are passengers.
- **Always wear your safety belt.** Under new laws you can get a ticket if anyone under 18 in your car isn't wearing a safety belt - and they can get a ticket, too. So buckle up for every trip.
- **Get to know your car.** Sun visors, door locks and parking brakes are there to make it easier and safer to drive. Use them.
- **Be a defensive driver.** Tailgating is a stupid reason to get in a crash. Try to keep four seconds of following distance between your car and the vehicle in front of you.
- **Focus only on driving.** Don't blast the music, talk on the phone, eat, study, or put on make-up while you're driving!
- **Don't load up your car with too many friends.** Some new laws limit the number of teenage passengers you can have in your car.
- **Don't get stressed out.** Pretend everyone else on the road is a close, personal friend.
- **Check your review mirror.** Check it before you brake. Check it after you brake. Check it all the time.
- **Follow traffic safety rules.** Learn and obey the rules of the road at all times.
- **Watch your speed!** Don't ever drive faster than you can handle. The speed limit is not only determined by the posted signs, but also by road and weather conditions. Don't drive too fast for your situation and obey all posted signs!
- **Never let friends drive your car.** If they crash you could lose money, car privileges, a friendship, even your life. (3)

Sources: (1) Missouri Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse – Alcohol-Impaired Driving; (2) www.madd.org; (3) www.whatsdrivingyou.org

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