

Main Office
8790 Manchester Road
St. Louis, MO 63144
(314) 962-3456



Branch Office
1723 Pennsylvania Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63104
(314) 664-7550

UNDERAGE DRINKING: A NATIONAL EPIDEMIC...A NATIONAL TRAGEDY!!!!

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. According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network, which monitors emergency room admissions across the country, during 2004, an estimated 142,701 alcohol-related emergency department visits were made by patients aged 12 to 20. These admissions were youth who were experiencing alcohol overdose or alcohol poisoning, alcohol-related suicide attempts, or those experiencing adverse reactions.

Face the Facts, or Face the Consequences!

- Of the three leading causes of death for teens (homicides, suicides and accidents) alcohol is the primary causative factor in all the categories
- Underage drinking costs U.S. citizens \$61.9 billion in 2001. These costs include medical care, work loss, academic underachievement/dropping out of school, costs of youth violence, youth traffic crashes, high-risk sex, youth property crime, youth injuries, poisonings and psychoses, fetal alcohol syndrome among teen mothers, youth alcohol treatment, etc.
- Young people consume almost 3.6 billion drinks annually or 10 million drinks every day!
- Alcohol use and higher levels of use among adolescents is associated with poor grades, absenteeism and higher rates of school dropout.
- Young people who begin drinking before 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence, and are 2 ½ times more likely to become abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at 21.
- In 2004, 65,562 youths 12-20 years old were admitted for alcohol treatment in the U.S. (or for alcohol in combination with another drug) representing about 12% of all those entering treatment for alcohol-related disorders.
- Every year on college campuses: more than 70,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assaults or date rapes; there are 696,000 alcohol-related assaults; there are 599,000 students injured because of alcohol; the average cost for alcohol-related vandalism is \$80,000/college, 95% of violent college campus crimes are alcohol-related, and 1,700 students die from alcohol-related accidents or events.
- 96% of all underage drinking is binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row), enough to go over legal intoxication. Binge drinking is growing at a much faster rate among girls than boys. Teen girls appear to be more vulnerable to many of the adverse consequences of alcohol; they appear to be more impaired than men after drinking equivalent amounts. Adolescent girls who drink even moderate amounts of alcohol may experience disrupted growth and puberty, and teen girls who binge drink are 63% more likely to become teen mothers.

The brain goes through dynamic change during adolescence, and alcohol can seriously damage long- and short-term growth processes. Damage from alcohol at this time can be long-term and irreversible. In addition, short-term or moderate drinking impairs learning and memory far more in youth than adults. Adolescents need only drink half as much as adults to suffer the same negative effects. Even at low levels alcohol impairs thinking and the decision making process, as well as one's ability to make rational judgments. It also loosens restraints and impulse control.

Alcohol can kill! At higher levels of intoxication (.30% blood alcohol content and above), the brain begins to "shut down". At .30% BAC, one falls into a semi-stupor; at .35% it is equivalent to surgical anesthesia – and at a minimal level to cause death in some people. At .40% BAC one can become comatose, and at .40 – 50% BAC the brain may totally shut down and there is a possible cessation of breathing and heartbeat.

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