

**Real Kids**  
are curious about  
**alcohol.**

**40%** try it  
by 8th grade.

**Talk Early.  
Talk Often.  
Get Others Involved.**

**A Family Guide**  
To Underage Drinking Prevention




A Life in the Community for Everyone  
**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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**You Are the  
Most Powerful  
Influence on Your  
Child's Behavior**



*The negative consequences of underage drinking are more widespread and serious than previously known. A growing body of research shows that alcohol can change the way the brain works and the way it's wired, and may have consequences reaching far beyond adolescence. Many more dangers of underage drinking are immediate, including alcohol poisoning, sexual and physical assault, and motor vehicle crashes. Underage drinking is a serious problem, with roots deep in our culture.*

*You can help protect your children from the risks associated with drinking by maintaining open communication and expressing a clear, consistent message that underage alcohol use is unacceptable. Building a close relationship with your children will increase the likelihood they come to you for help in making decisions that impact their health and well-being.*

*This guide provides facts and practical advice on how to talk with your children about underage drinking. It helps you create household rules to support your values. Society gives children mixed messages about alcohol. Make sure that your children get their information from the best resource available. **You.***



# The Surgeon General's Call to Action

*The Surgeon General is the Nation's top doctor and public health officer. The President of the United States appoints the Surgeon General to help protect and promote the health of the Nation. The Surgeon General lets people across the country know the latest news on how to get healthy and stay healthy. Because of emerging new knowledge about the number of children who drink, how much they drink and what happens when they drink, the Surgeon General issued a Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking. It explains why underage alcohol use is a major public health and safety issue. Rates of death and injury nearly triple between the early teen years and early adult life. Underage drinking contributes to this increase and that's why ending teen alcohol use can help save lives.*

*This brochure incorporates the latest information from the Call to Action, and will give you the knowledge and tools you need to take action against underage drinking.*














**What  
You Need  
to Know**

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

# A Standard Drink

beer or cooler	malt liquor	table wine	fortified wine	cordial, liqueur, or aperitif	brandy (a single shot)	spirits (a single shot of 80-proof gin, vodka, whiskey, etc.) Shown straight and in a highball glass with ice to show level before adding mixer*
						
~5% alcohol	~7% alcohol	~12% alcohol	~17% alcohol	~24% alcohol	~40% alcohol	~40% alcohol
12 oz.	8.5 oz.	5 oz.	3.5 oz.	2.5 oz.	1.5 oz.	1.5 oz.

**\*Note:** It can be difficult to estimate the number of standard drinks served in a single mixed drink made with hard liquor. Depending on factors, such as type of spirits and the recipe, one mixed drink can contain from one to three or more standard drinks.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A standard drink is any drink that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol. This is the amount usually found in:

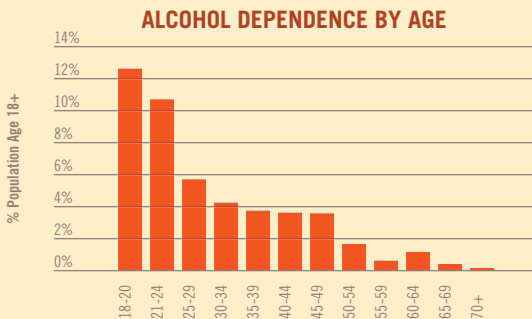
- > One 12-ounce beer
- > One 4–5-ounce glass of wine
- > One 1.5-ounce shot of 80 proof liquor

But not all drinks are standard drinks. Different drinks often have different amounts of alcohol. Mixed drinks may contain more than one shot of liquor, and different beers or wines may not have the same alcohol in them, even when the drinks are the same size. For example, some beers and beer products, like “ice” beers, and malt liquors, and some wines, have more alcohol than others.

*Remember, the legal drinking age is 21 and underage drinking can be a threat to health and development.*

# Underage Drinking

- > As they grow older, the chance that young people will use alcohol grows. Approximately 22.1 percent of 12–14 year olds say they have used alcohol at least once. By age 15–17 alcohol use more than doubles. And by 18–20 just over 80 percent have had at least one drink (NSDUH).<sup>1</sup>
- > A majority of underage drinkers in 2006 reported that when they last used alcohol they were either in someone else's home (53.4 percent) or their own home (30.3 percent) (NSDUH).<sup>2</sup>



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- > When young people drink, they tend to drink a lot at one time. Past month alcohol users aged 12 to 20 drank on an average of 5.9 days in the past month and consumed an average of 4.9 drinks per day on the days they drank in the past month (NSDUH).<sup>3</sup>
- > Among all underage current drinkers, 31.0 percent paid for the alcohol last time they drank, including 9.3 percent who purchased the alcohol themselves and 21.6 percent who gave money to someone else to purchase it. The remaining 69 percent of underage drinkers did not pay for the alcohol on their last drinking occasion (NSDUH).<sup>4</sup>

◀ *The prevalence of alcohol dependence is highest in the 18–20 and 21–24 year old groups. These kids don't just party.*<sup>5</sup>

# Underage Drinking

- > Almost 1 in 10 (9.4 percent) of persons aged 12 to 20 met the criteria for a diagnosable alcohol use disorder (NSDUH).<sup>6</sup>
- > Studies show an association between early drinking to heavy alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems in adulthood. In fact, **individuals who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are about 7 times more likely than those who start after age 21 to develop alcohol problems (NSDUH).**<sup>7</sup>
- > More young people use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs.<sup>8</sup>
- > Alcohol use kills more children than all illegal drugs combined.<sup>9</sup>

# Alcohol and Judgement

The teenage brain is still developing. Alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following:

- > Motor coordination. This includes the ability to walk or drive.
- > Impulse control. Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that a person will do something that they will regret when they are sober.
- > Memory. Impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.
- > Judgement and decision making capacity. Drinking may lead young people to engage in risky behaviors that can result in illness, injury, and even death.<sup>10</sup>

# Risks

*Alcohol use among youth is strongly correlated with violence, risky sexual behavior, poor academic performance and other harmful behaviors.<sup>11</sup>*

## **VIOLENCE**

- > Children who start drinking before age 15 are 12 times more likely to be injured while under the influence of alcohol and 10 times more likely to be in a fight after drinking, compared with those who wait until they are 21.<sup>12</sup>

## **SEXUAL ACTIVITY**

- > Underage drinking plays a significant role in risky sexual behavior, including unwanted, unintended, and unprotected sexual activity, and sex with multiple partners. Such behavior increases the risk for unplanned pregnancy and for contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including infection with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS<sup>13,14</sup>



### **SCHOOL**

- > Teens who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor performance than non-drinkers.<sup>15</sup>
- > Among eighth-graders, higher truancy rates are associated with greater rates of alcohol use in the past month.<sup>16</sup>

### **ILLICIT DRUG USE**

- > More than 67% of young people who start drinking before the age of 15 will try an illicit drug. Children who drink are 7.5 times more likely to use any illicit drug, more than 22 times more likely to use marijuana, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than children who never drink.<sup>17</sup>

### **DEATH AND INJURY**

- > Approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking each year. This includes death from car crashes, homicides, suicide, as well as from injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings.<sup>18</sup>
- > When young people drink and get into a car, they tend to make poor decisions that impact their safety.<sup>19</sup>
- > Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens and over one-third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.<sup>20</sup>

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