



TIPS *for* TEENS

Alcohol THE TRUTH ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING

Get The Facts

UNDERAGE DRINKING IS DANGEROUS.

Drinking alcohol can result in impaired decision making. This can make you less aware of your actions and unable to recognize potential danger. Drinking may also lead to impaired coordination, placing you at a greater risk of being injured from falls or vehicle crashes. While intoxicated, a person is more likely to engage in unsafe behavior, including drinking and driving, unprotected sex, and aggressive or violent actions.

UNDERAGE DRINKING CAN BE FATAL.

When a person has an alcohol overdose, their breathing and heart rate slows down to dangerous levels. Symptoms include confusion, losing consciousness, vomiting, seizures, and trouble breathing. Overdosing on alcohol can lead to permanent brain damage or death. In addition, driving after drinking alcohol can lead to vehicle accidents and deaths.

UNDERAGE DRINKING CAN LEAD TO AN ALCOHOL USE DISORDER.

When someone is unable to stop or control their alcohol use—even when facing serious health, social, or academic consequences—they have an alcohol use disorder that requires treatment. Attending individual or group counseling sessions and/or talking to their doctor about ways to reduce alcohol cravings can help.

Q&A

IS IT REALLY UNSAFE TO DRINK UNTIL I'M 21?

YES. The risks of underage drinking are high. Research suggests that drinking during the teen years could interfere with normal brain development and increase the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder later in life.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE DRINK ALCOHOL IF IT IS UNSAFE?

Many teens experience peer pressure to drink alcohol, and some are looking for a way to cope with stress; however, underage drinking will result in more problems—not fewer. In 2021, about 3.2 million young people aged 12 to 20 were past month binge drinkers (for males, 5 or more drinks, and for females, 4 or more drinks on the same occasion).

MY PARENTS USED TO DRINK WHEN THEY WERE UNDERAGE. WHY CAN'T I?

Minimum drinking age laws exist for a reason—they help keep everyone safer. After states increased the legal drinking age to 21, there were fewer car crashes. Also, drinking during the previous month for 18- to 20-year-olds declined after all states adopted a minimum legal drinking age of 21, from 59 percent in 1985 to 40 percent in 1991.

Before You Risk It!

1 KNOW THE LAW. The minimum drinking age in the United States is 21. Having a national minimum drinking age saves lives and improves health. There is even evidence that the law protects people from other drug dependence and suicide.

2 KNOW THE RISKS. Underage drinking contributes to more than 3,900 deaths among people below the age of 21 in the U.S. each year. Drinking under age 21 is also strongly linked with death from alcohol poisoning.

3 LOOK AROUND YOU. Although alcohol is the most commonly used substance by teens, most teens don't drink. Teens' alcohol use continues to drop. In the past 21 years, yearly alcohol use has decreased from 73% - 52% amongst 12th graders.

Learn More:

Get the latest information on how underage drinking affects the brain and body at teens.drugabuse.gov.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION, CONTACT:

SAMHSA
1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) (English and Español)
TTY 1-800-487-4889
www.samhsa.gov



A note on harm reduction:

Harm reduction can help manage the risks and benefits of using substances (alcohol, drugs) for personal health.

Harm reduction does not encourage drinking or substance use, especially if you are underage. Harm reduction acknowledges that there are ways young people can and might reduce harm if using substances

Harm reduction helps us understand how to best take care of our personal and community health while still acknowledging that not everyone will refrain from using substances altogether. For more resources on harm reduction, please visit, <https://www.release.org.uk/drugs-health-advice>