

PREVENTION OF UNDERAGE DRINKING IN THE U.S.

Underage drinking is a problem shared by all communities. Underage alcohol use can have serious consequences for both young people's health and the well-being of the community. The good news is that underage drinking can be prevented.

LEARN MORE TO BE THE ONE WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

What Communities Can Do



Parents and Families

Many young people identify parents as the leading influence in their decision to drink or not to drink,¹ making it important for parents and caregivers to take an active role in preventing underage alcohol use.

Monitor your children or other young family members for signs that may indicate involvement in underage drinking. It's important to remember that these behaviors could also point to other problems.

Some signs that may point to involvement in underage drinking are:²

- School problems;
- Rebelling against family rules;
- Switching friends, along with a reluctance to let you get to know the new friend;
- A lack of involvement in former interests;
- Mood changes, defensiveness, or a "nothing matters" attitude;
- Memory lapses;
- Blood-shot eyes;
- Lack of coordination; and
- Slurred speech.



Health Care Providers³

- Screen youth for alcohol use and conduct a brief intervention if necessary.
- Educate youth on the effects of underage drinking.
- For patients who drink:
 - Provide brief advice about the importance of not using alcohol until age 21.
 - Advise them not to drink alcohol and drive or ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking.
 - Consider referring youth at highest risk of harm from drinking for further evaluation or treatment.



Educators and School Administrators

Educators and school administrators have an opportunity to discuss the risks of drinking alcohol with their students. You can help prevent underage drinking by:⁴

- Encouraging student involvement in school, a proven factor in reducing underage drinking;
- Creating an environment that helps students explore their talents and follow their passions;
- Being a caring adult and a mentor;
- Relaying information to parents about school policies and the dangers of underage drinking;
- Enforcing strict policies against alcohol use on school property and at school events;

- Equipping students with knowledge, skills, and motivation to resist pressures to drink;
- Putting policies and a mechanism in place for referring students to the appropriate health care providers or other personnel if they need services or treatment.

Visit <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/resources/Infographics/default.aspx> to access and share infographics about underage drinking, including an infographic developed by SAMHSA that illustrates the potential impact of underage drinking on academic performance.



Community Organizations

When discussing or proposing a prevention effort, remember that effective community prevention interventions require a mix of program components. These might include:⁵

- Hosting a Town Hall Meeting about underage drinking.
- Peer-led education activities in high schools, programs for college students, and the establishment of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) chapters.



Alcohol Retailers⁶

Alcohol retailers are legally responsible for preventing the selling or serving of alcoholic beverages to young people under age 21. Retailers can also engage in other prevention strategies:

- Create and maintain sales and service policies that every staffer should follow, and train staff and management on the alcohol sales policies. Monitor staff conduct and keep records of trainings, compliance checks, and disciplinary actions.
- Provide tools to assist employees with ID verification (e.g., guidebook that shows valid ID formats for all U.S. states and territories, ID scanners, calendar showing birthdates eligible to buy alcohol).
- Post signs about ID-checking policies at the entrance and near registers.
- Establish working relationships with local law enforcement, and get involved in industry associations and the community to express a commitment to prevent underage sales and use.
- Don't display youth-oriented alcohol advertising or place alcohol near items youth are likely to buy, like sodas, snack foods, or energy drinks. Don't advertise alcohol products in college or high school publications, or near schools or playgrounds.



Everyone

- Find out about underage drinking issues in your community, what your community is already doing to address the problem, and what actions are still needed.⁷
- Serve as a positive role model for young people by not drinking excessively, by avoiding alcohol when driving, boating, or operating machinery, and by seeking professional help for alcohol-related problems.⁸

Helpful Resources

- **Talk. They Hear You**, SAMHSA's underage drinking prevention campaign, helps parents and caregivers start talking to their children early—as early as 9 years old—about the dangers of alcohol. It is available at <http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking>.
- **Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention for Youth: A Practitioner's Guide**, available at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Practitioner/YouthGuide/YouthGuide.pdf> is a guide provided by the NIAAA that serves as a tool for identifying youth at risk for alcohol-related problems.
- The **Too Smart To Start** website, <http://www.toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov>, helps youth, families, educators, and communities prevent underage alcohol use and its related problems.

Helpful Resources Continued

- SAMHSA's **underage drinking** topic page, found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking-topic>, contains an overview, data and links to various publications and campaigns.
- **The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking**, available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44360/>, is a resource from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) providing information on underage drinking.
- **Safe Schools, Healthy Students** is an initiative of HHS, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Justice, designed to prevent violence and substance abuse among our nation's youth, schools, and communities, available at <http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov>.
- The **Stop Underage Drinking** website, <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov>, is a collaboration among SAMHSA and other federal agencies and provides a wealth of information on underage drinking, such as data and statistics; resources for parents, youth, educators, community organizations, and businesses; and more.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be consuming alcohol underage, help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year through SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD). The Helpline provides free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish.

Sources

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- ⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking*. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General). Retrieved December 10, 2014 from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44360/>.
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- ⁶ Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Consumer Protection. (September 2013). *Alcohol Retailers Can Help Reduce Teen Drinking*. Retrieved on December 10, 2014, from <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0397-alcohol-retailers-can-help-reduce-teen-drinking>.
- ⁷ Massachusetts Department of Public Health. (2006). *Working Together to Reduce Underage Drinking*. Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, Brochure SA1036. Boston, MA: Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Retrieved December 10, 2014 from <http://www.maclearinghouse.com/ALCH/SA1036.html>.
- ⁸ Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking*. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General). Retrieved December 10, 2014 from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44360/>.