

## CHEMICAL HEALTH TREND CORNER:

### Helpful advice for Prom and spring events from Hutchinson Police Services and HHS Chemical Health Prevention Specials

Dear Parents:

It seems we are always in the midst of celebrating one thing or another – prom, graduation, end of the school year, summer, and more. This is good, but it can also be worrisome. We want to take this opportunity to remind you that as parents you have a particularly important role in shaping these events.

### **Please help keep your teen and his or her peers stay safe and alcohol-free.**

Alcohol use is illegal by those in Minnesota who are under the age of 21 years. The only exception is that parents may provide alcohol to their own children in their own homes. Surveys of teens indicate that adults are teens' primary source of alcohol: at home, in bars and restaurants or on the street. To help reduce underage alcohol use, you can:

Refuse to supply alcohol to underage young people when you host your own celebration. Do not buy a keg of beer for teens at a high school graduation or other party. This is illegal and it also invites young people to drink illegally. Teen alcohol use is **not** a rite of passage into adulthood. In fact, alcohol has kept too many teens from becoming adults.

Make sure that alcohol is not available at events your teen attends. Talk with other parents and party hosts to ensure alcohol-free celebrations. Be proactive. When parents stand together on this issue, they present a united front to teens.

All law enforcement agencies within McLeod County are participating in the Zero Adult Provider program (ZAP). With this program law enforcement agencies will be actively investigating and prosecuting adults who provide alcohol to underage drinkers. Please take an active role in assisting us in protecting your child.

Remember that as a parent, you play an important role in preventing underage alcohol use. In research studies, teens say that their number one reason for refusing to drink alcohol is centered on worrying about what their parents would think. That is a powerful statement about the importance of your message and role modeling.

We care about young people. We want them to enjoy celebrations and to have fond memories of them. Please join us in this effort to help teens remain safe and sober.

Sincerely,

#### **HUTCHINSON POLICE SERVICES**

Daniel T. Hatten

Director of Police / Emergency Management  
Services

&

#### **HUTCHINSON HIGH SCHOOL**

Carmen Morrow Chemical Health Prevention  
Counselor

### Teenage Drinking Understanding the Dangers & Talking to Your Child



Underage drinking is a serious public health problem in the United States. Alcohol is the most widely used substance of

abuse among America's youth, and drinking by young people poses enormous health and safety risks.

The consequences of underage drinking can affect everyone— regardless of age or drinking status. We all feel the effects of the aggressive behavior, property damage, injuries, violence, and deaths that can result from underage drinking. This is not simply a problem for some families—it is a nationwide concern.

- More than half of American youths ages 12 to 20 have tried alcohol. Girls are nearly as likely as boys to experiment with drinking.
- Underage and binge drinking is risky and can lead to car accidents, violent behavior, alcohol poisoning, and other health problems.
- Drinking at a young age greatly increases the risk of developing alcohol problems later in life.
- Talking to kids early and openly about the risks of drinking can help reduce their chances of becoming problem drinkers.

Today, the average age an American girl has her first drink is 13; for a boy, it's 11. In the U.S. and many other countries, underage drinking is a widespread problem with often serious consequences. Young people who drink are more likely to be the victims of violent crime, to be involved in alcohol-related traffic accidents, and to have depression and anxiety. Other risky behaviors are also linked to early drinking. Young people who start using alcohol before age 21 are more likely to:

- Be involved in violent behaviors
- Attempt suicide
- Engage in unprotected sex or have multiple sex partners
- Develop alcohol problems in later life

### Early Age Alcohol Use

Kids are experimenting with alcohol at earlier ages than ever before. A national survey found that slightly more than half of young adults in the U.S. between the ages of 12 and 20 have consumed alcohol at least once. Some researchers speculate that teens are more vulnerable to addiction because the pleasure center of the brain matures before the part of the brain responsible for impulse control and executive decision making. In other words, teenagers' capacity for pleasure reaches adult proportions well before their capacity for sound decision making does.

In past generations, boys were much more likely than girls to experiment with alcohol in their teens, but girls are catching up. In 2009, 58% of all males ages 12 and older were current drinkers, higher than the rate for females (47%). But in the youngest group (ages 12 to 17), the percentage of current drinkers was nearly the same (15% of boys, 14% of girls).

While many young people will independently cut down on their drinking or stop drinking altogether as they reach their mid-20s and assume the responsibilities of being an employee, spouse, or parent, the risks of early age drinking remain. People who have their first drink at age 14 or younger are six times more likely to develop alcohol problems than those who don't try alcohol until the legal drinking age.

### Factors Affecting Risk of Developing a Drinking Problem

As well as the age at which they start consuming alcohol, a number of other factors influence a teen or young adult's drinking behavior and whether it will become a problem. These include:

- **Race and ethnicity.** Some racial groups, such as American Indians and Native Alaskans for example, are more at risk than others of developing alcohol addiction.
- **Genetics.** A teen with an alcoholic sibling or parent is four times more likely to develop a problem with alcohol than someone without such a family history.
- **The presence of mental health disorders.** Alcohol problems often go hand in hand with mental health problems such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and schizophrenia.
- **Personality traits.** Teenagers who believe alcohol makes it easier to socialize, for example, tend to drink more than those who don't believe that alcohol loosens their social inhibitions.
- **Influence of family and peers.** Teens are at greater risk for developing alcohol-related problems when alcohol is readily available at home or among their peer group, and if drunkenness is acceptable.

- **Gender.** Men are more likely to drink heavily than women, but women become addicted at lower levels and shorter duration of use. See [Women and Alcohol](#).

### Dangers of Drinking While Young



The years between 18 and 25 are a time of considerable change, as teenagers spread their wings and leave home, many for the first time. While these may be exciting years, widespread alcohol use means they may be risky years as well. The highest prevalence of problem drinking occurs among young adults aged 18 to 25, nearly 42% of whom admit to binge drinking at least once a month (drinking five or more drinks in rapid succession for men, four or more for women).

Many of us typically think of college as the setting where older teens and younger 20's sometimes drink to excess. However, several studies show that heavy drinking is widespread among *all* young adults regardless of whether or not they attend college. College students tend to drink less often than nonstudents, but when they do imbibe—at parties, for example—they tend to drink more.

The prevalent use of alcohol among teens and young adults is alarming for a number of reasons:

- **Alcohol is a major factor in fatal automobile crashes.** About one-third of drivers ages 21 to 24 who died in a car crash in 2009 had a blood alcohol level that was over the legal limit.
- **Drinking may have lasting health effects.** Some researchers believe that heavy drinking at this age, when the brain is still developing, may cause lasting impairments in brain functions such as memory, coordination, and motor skills—at least among susceptible individuals.
- **Drinking can lead to sexual assaults and rape.** Each year, approximately 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape. [Read More:](#)

### Teen Girls Who Drink Face Special Challenges



Teenage girls experiment with alcohol for many of the same reasons that boys do, but they face some challenges boys don't:

- Among teenage heavy drinkers (those having five or more drinks in a row at least five times in one month), girls are more likely to say that

they drink to escape problems or to cope with frustration or anger.

- Girls are more likely to drink because of family problems than because of peer pressure.
- Drinking can delay puberty in girls, while abusing alcohol can cause endocrine disorders during puberty.
- Teenage girls who drink are more likely to have unprotected sex than girls who don't drink, putting them at increased risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

### Binge Drinking & Alcohol Poisoning

Binge drinking—consuming five or more drinks at a sitting, for males, four or more for females—can cause teens to pass out, black out (lose memory of events that occurred while they were intoxicated), feel sick, miss school, or behave in ways that would otherwise be uncharacteristic of them. For example, they may drive while drunk or get into arguments. Some binge drinkers imbibe heavily every weekend and abstain or drink only in moderation during the week. Others binge less often—for example, during holidays, on special occasions, or at times of great stress. This kind of problem drinking may go unnoticed because people may excuse an occasional binge as a celebration that got carried away or as a response to unusual stress.

Although many young adults drink responsibly or abstain altogether, binge drinking is still a common problem. While teens as young as age 13 admit to this practice, it becomes more popular in mid-adolescence and peaks in the college years. College students between the ages of 18 and 22 are more likely to report binge drinking than non-students of the same age. Recent news reports of deaths from

alcohol poisoning on college campuses have spotlighted the dangers of binge drinking.

Binge drinkers are **eight** times more likely than other college students to:

- Miss classes
- Fall behind in schoolwork
- Be injured
- Damage property

Binge drinkers also face the grim consequences of alcohol poisoning, a severe and potentially fatal reaction to an alcohol overdose.

### How to Recognize and Treat Alcohol Poisoning

Because alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, drinking too much, too fast, slows some bodily functions (such as heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing) to a dangerous level, causing the drinker to lose consciousness.

Possible signs of alcohol poisoning include:

- Unconscious or semiconscious state
- Slow respiration—eight or fewer breaths per minute, or lapses between breaths of more than eight seconds
- Cold, clammy, pale, or bluish skin
- A strong odor of alcohol on the breath and coming from the skin

Here's what to do in an alcohol-poisoning emergency:

- Never leave someone who may have alcohol poisoning alone to "sleep it off."
- Call 911 immediately.

- Gently turn the person on his or her left side, using a pillow placed at the small of the back to keep him or her in that position. This will help prevent choking should the individual vomit.
- Stay with the person until medical help arrives.

### How to Talk to Teens about Responsible Drinking



As a parent, grandparent teacher, or friend, you have a major impact on the choices that the children in your life make, especially during the preteen and early teen years. One study reported that adolescents from families with alcohol problems were less likely to use alcohol themselves if they felt a sense of control over their environments, had good coping skills, and had highly organized families. Other researchers have found that preserving family rituals, such as keeping established daily routines and celebrating holidays, also can make a difference in steering kids clear of alcohol abuse.

Talking to young people openly and honestly about drinking is also vitally important. Delaying the age at which young people take their first drink lowers their risk of becoming problem drinkers. That's reason enough to talk to the teenagers in your life about alcohol, but it's not the only one. These are some of the other important reasons:

- Alcohol has harmful effects on developing brains and bodies.
- For adolescents ages 15 to 20, alcohol is implicated in more than a third of driver fatalities resulting from automobile accidents and about two-fifths of drowning's.
- Drinking interferes with good judgment, leading young people into risky behavior and making them vulnerable to sexual coercion.
- Teenagers who use alcohol and tobacco are at greater risk of using other drugs.
- Teenagers who drink are more likely to develop behavioral problems, including stealing, fighting, and skipping school.
- Underage drinking is illegal.

### Start the Conversation Early

While most people recognize the importance of discussing alcohol with kids, they aren't always



sure when to initiate this discussion. Adolescents are often nervous and confused as they face their first opportunities to try alcohol and are often interested to hear your thoughts on the subject.

Set the stage early by letting your teenager know that he or she can talk to you about anything, without judgment or lecturing.

### Open Up and Listen

Ask open-ended questions, and listen to the answers without interrupting.

- **Talk openly about your family history.** If your family has had problems with alcohol, your child should know about it. Be open about your own experiences, too.
- **Set clear expectations, and communicate your values.** Youngsters are less likely to drink when they know that parents and other important adults in their lives have strong feelings about it.
- **Control your emotions.** If you hear something that upsets you, take a few deep breaths and express your feelings in a positive way.
- **Ask about your teenager's friends.** Express an interest in getting to know them better. Getting to know these friends and their parents will help you understand your teenager's world.

[Read More:](#)

### New Research Reveals Harmful Biological Changes Associated with Bullying

[Bullying](#) is defined as unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. [Studies](#) suggest that

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this type of peer victimization is a pervasive issue — 28% of children and youth reported being bullied at school during the 2011 school year. [Research since the 1990s](#) shows that children who are bullied are more likely than their peers to develop mental and physical health problems. Now, new [neurobiological research](#) shows the negative effects of bullying on the physical health, mental health, and overall well-being of children and youth.

Genetics research, neuroimaging studies, and studies of the stress response system reveal harmful biological changes associated with bullying. For instance, [studies](#) show bullying causes depression in children and youth. Researchers have tried to explain this bullying-health link by examining the role of the body's stress response system. These [studies](#) suggest that bullying impacts the body's stress response system and that these changes can be risk factors for poorer health. Researchers are now examining specific genetic vulnerabilities that may place a person at risk for later health impairment and disease risk factors, such as poorer immune function. These studies suggest that peer victimization seems to “get under the skin” and that exposure to peer abuse affects the developing stress response and expression of genes, which places children and youth at greater risk for poorer health outcomes. [Read the full blog on StopBullying.gov](#)

