

TIPS for TEENS

UNDERAGE DRINKING

THE TRUTH ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING



GET THE FACTS

UNDERAGE DRINKING IS DANGEROUS. Drinking alcohol can result in poor decision making which can make you less aware of your actions and unable to recognize potential danger. Drinking may also lead to impaired motor coordination, placing you at a greater risk of being injured from falls or vehicle crashes. While intoxicated, you are more likely to engage in unsafe behavior, including drinking and driving, unprotected sex, and aggressive or violent actions.¹

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, being unconscious, 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.²

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.^{3,4}

? Q&A

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

A. 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.⁵

Q. WHY DO MY FRIENDS DRINK ALCOHOL IF IT IS UNSAFE?

A. 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).⁶

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

A. 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 1991.⁷

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Underage drinking is dangerous and can be deadly. Talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust if you have questions.

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 | store.samhsa.gov



SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



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.⁸

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.⁹ Drinking under age 21 is also strongly linked with death from alcohol poisoning.¹⁰

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. From 2001 to 2022, past year alcohol use by 12th graders decreased from 73 percent to 52 percent.¹¹



MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR FOR RESOURCES USED IN THIS

"TIPS for TEENS,"

visit store.samhsa.gov or call
1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)
(English and Español).

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KNOW THE SIGNS

How can you tell if a friend is using alcohol? Potential side effects and symptoms include:¹²

- **Changes in mood, including anger and irritability**
- **Academic and/or behavioral problems in school**
- **Changing groups of friends**
- **Less interest in activities and/or care in appearance**



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS USING ALCOHOL?

BE A FRIEND. SAVE A LIFE.

Encourage your friend to stop drinking or seek help from a parent, teacher, or other caring adult.

For 24/7 free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Español, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at:

1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

or visit the SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator at: findtreatment.samhsa.gov

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¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), SAMHSA. (2022). The 2021 Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking. Retrieved from <https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/about-iccpud/data/national-reports/report-to-congress/default.aspx>

² National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). (2023). *Understanding the Dangers of Alcohol Overdose*. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-dangers-of-alcohol-overdose>

³ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). (2023). *Understanding Alcohol Use Disorder*. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-alcohol-use-disorder>

^{4,12} National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). (2023). *Get the Facts About Underage Drinking*. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/underage-drinking>

⁵ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). (2023). *Alcohol and the Adolescent Brain*. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/alcohol-and-adolescent-brain>

⁶ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2022). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP22-07-01-005, NSDUH Series H-57). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2021-nsduh-annual-national-report>

^{7,8,10} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2022). *Age 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age*. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/minimum-legal-drinking-age.htm>

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2022). *Underage Drinking*. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>

¹¹ Miech, R. A., Johnston, L. D., Patrick, M. E., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J.E. (2023). *Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2022: Secondary School Students*. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan. <http://monitoringthefuture.org/results/publications/monographs/>