

How Does
Alcohol
Affect the World of a
Child?



Because we are constantly updating our web pages to incorporate the most recent statistics, there may be some differences between the statistics in our published documents and those on the Web site. Please note that the Web site statistics are always our most current.

FAMILY

Alcohol is the #1 drug of choice for children and adolescents.¹

- Before the age of 18, approximately one in four children is exposed to family alcoholism or addiction, or alcohol abuse.²
- Children of alcoholics are significantly more likely to initiate drinking during adolescence and to develop alcohol use disorders.³
- Parents' drinking behaviors and favorable attitudes about drinking have been associated with adolescents' initiating and continuing drinking.^{4,5,6}
- Research studies indicate that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved with them and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other.^{4,7}
- Adolescents drink less and have fewer alcohol-related problems when their parents discipline them consistently and set clear expectations.⁴
- Any drinking during pregnancy presents a risk to the fetus.⁸
- Older siblings' alcohol use can influence the alcohol use of younger siblings in the family, particularly for same sex siblings.⁹

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2005. Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings. Rockville, MD: Office of Applied Studies.

² Grant BF. 2000. Estimates of US children exposed to alcohol abuse and dependence in the family. *American Journal of Public Health* 90(1):112-115.

³ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. 1997. Youth Drinking: Risk Factors and Consequences. Alcohol Alert No. 37.

⁴ Hawkins JD, Graham JW, Maguin E, et al. 1997. Exploring the effects of age of alcohol use initiation and psychosocial risk factors on subsequent alcohol misuse. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 58(3):280-290.

⁵ Andrews JA, Hops H, Ary D. 1993. Parental influence on early adolescent substance use: Specific and nonspecific effects. *Journal of Early Adolescence* 13(3):285-310.

⁶ Ary DV, Tildesley E, Hops H. 1993. The influence of parent, sibling, and peer modeling and attitudes on adolescent use of alcohol. *International Journal of the Addictions* 28(9):853-880.

⁷ Resnick MD, Bearman PS, Blum RW, et al. 1997. Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 278(10):823-832.

⁸ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. 2004. NIAAA Advisory Council Task Force Recommendation On "Binge Drinking" Definition.

⁹ McGue M, Sharma A, Benson P. 1996. Parent and sibling influences on adolescent alcohol use and misuse: Evidence from a U.S. adoption cohort. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 57(1):8-18.

THE CHILD

Each day, 7,000 kids in the United States under the age of 16 take their first drink.¹

- Persons who first drank alcohol before age 15 were more than five times as likely to report alcohol dependence or abuse in the past year than were persons who first drank at age 21 or older. Specifically, 16% of those who began drinking alcohol before age 12 reported alcohol dependence or abuse in the past year, as did 15.5% of those who began between ages 12 and 14. In contrast, 2.6% of persons who reported alcohol dependence or abuse started drinking at 21 or older.²
- Almost 74% of persons age 21 or older reported that they started drinking alcohol before age 21. Of these, 4% reported first drinking before age 12, 14% between ages 12 and 14, 33% between ages 15 and 17, and 22% between ages 18 and 20.²
- 64% of 8th-graders and 84% of 10th-graders believe that alcohol is readily available to them for consumption.³
- Almost 20% of 8th-graders, and 42% of 10th-graders have been drunk at least once.³
- Ninth-grade girls now report consuming more alcohol than do ninth-grade boys: 38.5% of girls and 33.9% of boys reported drinking in the past month, and 20.9% of girls and 18.8% of boys reported binge drinking.⁴ In 2001, girls reported consuming alcohol at rates less than or nearly equal to boys.⁵
- 36.4% of ninth-grade students reported having consumed alcohol before they were age 13. In contrast, only 19.3% of ninth-graders reported having smoked cigarettes, and 11.7% reported having used marijuana before they were age 13.⁴
- Rates of drinking differ among racial and ethnic minority groups. Among students in grades 9 to 12, 32% of non-Hispanic white students, 15% of African American students, and 29% of Hispanic students reported binge drinking.⁴
- A study of 5th-through 11th-grade students found that those who are exposed to and enjoy alcohol advertisements have more favorable beliefs about drinking and say they are more likely to drink in the future and consume more alcohol.⁶

¹ According to a September 2004 analysis by J. Gfroerer, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, calculated using the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

² Office of Applied Studies. 2004. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. NSDUH Report: Alcohol Dependence or Abuse and Age at First Use. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

³ Johnston LD, O'Malley PM, Bachman JG, and Schulenberg JE. 2006. Monitoring the Future national results on adolescent drug use: Overview of key findings, 2005. Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2004. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance United States, 2003. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: CDC Surveillance Summaries 53(SS-2):1-96.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2002. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance United States, 2001. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: CDC Surveillance Summaries 51(SS-4):1-64.

⁶ Chen MJ, Grube JW. 2001. TV beer and soft drink advertising: What young people like and what effects? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

COMMUNITY

An overwhelming number of Americans (96%) are concerned about underage drinking, and a majority support measures that would help reduce teen drinking, such as stricter controls on alcohol sales, advertising, and promotion.¹

- In a national survey a majority of respondents supported policies restricting access to alcohol:
 - 80% supported the minimum legal drinking age of 21
 - 87% believed there should be penalties for adult providers of alcohol to youth
 - 70% supported compliance checks
 - 81% supported higher alcohol taxes.¹
- A majority of the respondents in the above survey supported restrictions on advertising and marketing of alcohol:
 - 67% supported bans on liquor ads on TV
 - 59% supported bans on beer and wine ads on TV
 - 61% supported bans on billboard alcohol ads
 - 62% supported bans on sports promotion.¹
- In a national study, 8th- and 10th graders reported disapproval of certain drinking behaviors among their peers:
 - 51% of 8th-graders and almost 39% of 10th-graders disapprove of those who try one or two drinks of alcohol
 - 79% and 77% disapprove of those who take one or two drinks every day
 - 83% and 74% disapprove of those who have five or more drinks once or twice each weekend.²

¹ Wagenaar AC, Harwood E, Bernat D. 2002. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2001 Youth Access to Alcohol Survey: Summary Report. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program.

² Johnston LD, O'Malley PM, Bachman JG, and Schulenberg JE. 2006. Monitoring the Future national results on adolescent drug use: Overview of key findings, 2005. Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

SCHOOL

Recent research shows that the human brain continues to develop into the early twenties.¹

- Research indicates that adolescents who abuse alcohol may remember 10% less of what they have learned than those who don't drink.¹
- Among eighth-graders, students with higher grade point averages reported less alcohol use in the past month.²
- Among eighth-graders, higher truancy rates were associated with greater rates of alcohol use in the past month.²
- High school students who use alcohol or other drugs frequently are up to five times more likely than other students to drop out of school.³
- Evidence suggests that alcohol use by peers is a strong predictor of adolescent use of alcohol.⁴
- One national study found that students are less likely to use alcohol if they are socially accepted by people at school, and feel that teachers treat students fairly.⁵
- According to a 1995 national survey of fourth-through sixth-graders who read the Weekly Reader, more than half (54%) reported learning about the dangers of illicit drugs at school, but fewer than a third (30%) learned about the dangers of drinking and smoking at school.⁶

¹ Brown SA, Tapert SF, Granholm E, et al. 2000. Neurocognitive functioning of adolescents: Effects of protracted alcohol use. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* 24(2):164-171.

² O'Malley PM, Johnston LD, Bachman JG. 1998. Alcohol use among adolescents. *Alcohol Health & Research World* 22(2):85-93.

³ The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. 2001. *Malignant Neglect: Substance Abuse and America's Schools*. New York: Columbia University.

⁴ Hawkins JD, Graham JW, Maguin E, et al. 1997. Exploring the effects of age of alcohol use initiation and psychosocial risk factors on subsequent alcohol misuse. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 58(3):280-290.

⁵ Resnick MD, Bearman PS, Blum RW, et al. 1997. Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 278(10):823-832.

⁶ The Weekly Reader. 1995. *National Survey on Drugs and Alcohol*. Middletown, CT: Field Publications.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

Those who begin drinking at age 14 or younger are significantly more likely to experience unintentional injuries, physical fights, and motor vehicle crashes after drinking.^{1,2,3}

- Among high school students who reported riding with a driver who had been drinking, 80% were frequent drinkers and only 14% never drank.⁴
- Among 12- to 17-year-old current drinkers, 31% had extreme levels of psychological distress, and 39% exhibited serious behavioral problems.⁵
- In 2000, youths ages 12 to 17 who reported past-year alcohol use (19.6%) were more than twice as likely as youths who did not (8.6%) to be at risk for suicide during this time period.⁶
- Girls ages 12 to 16 who are current drinkers are four times more likely than their nondrinking peers to suffer from depression.⁷
- In 2004, 1.6 million youth ages 12 to 17 needed treatment for an alcohol problem. Of this group, only 126,000 (8.0%) of them received any treatment at a specialty facility, leaving an estimated 1.4 million youths who needed but did not receive treatment.⁸
- Of all children under age 14 killed in vehicle crashes in 2004, 21% were killed in alcohol-related crashes.⁹

¹ Hingson R, Heeren T, Jamanka A, et al. 2000. Age of drinking onset and unintentional injury involvement after drinking. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 284(12): 1527-1533.

² Hingson R, Heeren T, Levenson S et al. 2002. Age of drinking onset and involvement in alcohol related motor vehicle crashes. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 34(1): (85-92).

³ Hingson R, Heeren T, Zakocs R. 2001. Age of drinking onset and involvement in physical fights after drinking. *Pediatrics* 108(4):872-877.

⁴ Hingson R, Kenkel D. 2004. Social, health and economic consequences of underage drinking. In: *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, Background papers [CD-ROM]. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 351-382.

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 1999. *The Relationship Between Mental Health and Substance Abuse Among Adolescents*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

⁶ Office of Applied Studies. 2002. *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. NHSDA Report: Substance Use and the Risk of Suicide Among Youths*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

⁷ Hanna EZ, Hsaio-Ye Y, Dufour M. 2000. The relationship of drinking alone and other substance use alone and in combination to health and behavior problems among youth aged 12-16: Findings from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III). Paper presented at the 23rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism, June 24-29, 2000, Denver, CO.

⁸ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2005. *Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*. Rockville, MD: Office of Applied Studies.

⁹ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. 2005. *Traffic Safety Facts 2004 — Alcohol*. Washington, DC: US Department of Transportation.

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

Alcohol is the leading contributor to the leading causes of death among young people in the United States.^{1,2}

- In 2002, about 18 million adults in the US met diagnostic criteria for alcohol disorders.³
- More than one-half of American adults have a close family member who is an alcoholic or has abused alcohol.⁴
- Research was conducted in 1998 to determine the total cost attributable to the consequences of underage drinking. The cost was more than \$58 billion per year, based on year 2000 dollars.⁵
- In 1998, the estimated productivity loss for workers with past or current alcoholism was \$86.4 billion. Productivity losses were greatest for males who initiated drinking before age 15.⁶
- In a survey of 18- to 24-year-old current drinkers who failed to complete high school, nearly 60% had begun to drink before age 16.⁷
- Long-term heavy alcohol use is the leading cause of illness and death from liver disease in the U.S.⁸
- Alcohol is implicated in more than 100,000 deaths annually.⁹
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that the laws specifying 21 as the minimum drinking age have saved 23,733 lives since the mid-1970s.¹⁰

¹ Hingson R, Kenkel D. 2004. Social, health and economic consequences of underage drinking. In: Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility, Background papers [CD-ROM]. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 351-382.

² Hingson R, Heeren T, Jamanka A, et al. 2000. Age of drinking onset and unintentional injury involvement after drinking. *Journal of American Medical Association* 284(12): 1527-1533.

³ Grant B, Dawson D, Stinson F, et al. 2004. The 12-Month Prevalence and Trends in DSM-IV Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: United States, 1991-1992 and 2001-2002. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 74(3):223-234.

⁴ Dawson DA, Grant BF. 1998. Family history of alcoholism and gender: Their combined effects on DSM-IV alcohol dependence and major depression. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 59(1):97-106.

⁵ Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Costs of Underage Drinking, prepared September 5, 2002.

⁶ Harwood H. 2000. Updating Estimates of the Economic Costs of Alcohol Abuse in the United States: Estimates, Update Methods and Data. Report prepared by The Lewin Group for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Based on estimates, analyses, and data reported in Harwood H, Fountain D, Livermore G. 1998. The Economic Costs of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in the United States 1992. Report prepared for the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services. NIH Publication No. 98-4327. Rockville, MD: National Institutes of Health.

⁷ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. 1998. Drinking in the United States: Main Findings from the 1992 National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey (NLAES). US Alcohol Epidemiologic Data Reference Manual, Volume 6. Rockville, MD: NIAAA.

⁸ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. 2000. 10th Special Report to the US Congress on Alcohol and Health. Rockville, MD: NIAAA.

⁹ McGinnis JM, Foege WH. 1993. Actual causes of death in the United States. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270(18):2207-2212.

¹⁰ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. National Highway Safety Traffic Association. 2005. Traffic Safety Facts 2004— Young Drivers. Washington, DC: US Department of Transportation.

ASK YOURSELF

As Parents

- Do you know how to discuss alcohol use with your child and where to get information to help you?
- Do you know your child's friends, and do you feel that they provide positive influences on your child's activities?
- Do you know the extent of drinking by children in your neighborhood and how to find local organizations that are working on the issue?
- Do you know the legal consequences if your child is caught drinking alcohol?
- Do you know your State's laws about providing alcohol to anyone under 21?

For assistance in answering these questions, please visit the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Web site at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>, and the *Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free* Web site at <http://www.alcoholfreechildren.org>.

As Teachers, Administrators, and School Counselors

- Has your school or community assessed student drinking to determine the extent of the problem?
- Do you know what factors may be contributing to student drinking in your school or community (e.g., easy access to alcohol, peer pressure, adults' failure to address the issue)?
- Do you know what steps, if any, are being taken within your school system to help kids resist the pressure to drink?
- Is your school currently working to educate parents about alcohol use among children?
- Does your school have an active partnership with the families of its students?

As Concerned Citizens

- Do you know how easily children in your community can obtain alcohol and what communities can do to prevent access to alcohol by young people?
- Does your community have educational programs and policies to prevent children from drinking?
- Does your community have "alcohol-free" events? If not, do you know how to initiate them?
- Is there collaboration among public and private schools, community businesses, local government, and the police force to develop and enforce policies related to youth alcohol use?

The statistics in this booklet are current at the time of publication. We continually update these statistics and post them on our Web site, www.alcoholfreechildren.org. Please refer to the Web site for the most recent statistics.

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