Alcohol – Underage Drinking Discussion Guide

1. Overview
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. Reducing underage drinking will require community-based efforts to monitor the activities of youth and decrease youth access to alcohol.

Reducing underage drinking will require community-based efforts to monitor the activities of youth and decrease youth access to alcohol. Recent publications by the Surgeon General1 and the Institute of Medicine5 outlined many prevention strategies for the prevention of underage drinking, such as enforcement of minimum legal drinking age laws, national media campaigns targeting youth and adults, increasing alcohol excise taxes, reducing youth exposure to alcohol advertising, and development of comprehensive community-based programs.

2. Data points
- 8.5% of high school students in Georgia report drinking alcohol in past 30-days.
- Youth who begin drinking before 15 are 5x more likely to abuse or become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking after 21 and in 2019, 18.2% of GA high schoolers reported that they had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before the age of 15.
- Most alcoholics in America begin drinking before age 18.
- Alcohol use interrupts normal brain “wiring” by slowing down brain activity and development.

Social Host Liability
- An adult allowing underage drinking on property they own, rent, or lease is referred to as a “Social Host”.
- Current Georgia Laws only hold accountable an individual that gives an underage person alcohol if they know that they will be driving.
- 35 States have adopted Social Host Laws including our contiguous states.

3. Frequently Asked Questions:
How does alcohol affect a person?
Alcohol affects every organ in the body. It is a central nervous system depressant that is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream. Alcohol is metabolized in the liver by enzymes. However, the liver can only metabolize a small amount of alcohol at a time, leaving the excess alcohol to circulate throughout the body. The intensity of the effect of alcohol on the body is directly related to the amount consumed.

Why do some people react differently to alcohol than others?
Individual reactions to alcohol vary, and are influenced by many factors, such as:
- Age.
- Sex.
- Race or ethnicity.
- Physical condition (e.g. weight, fitness level).
- Amount of food consumed before drinking.
- How quickly the alcohol was consumed.
- Use of drugs or prescription medicines.
- Family history of alcohol problems.

Isn’t it safer for teens to drink at home than elsewhere?
Adult supervised drinking actually results in more overall drinking in places other than home.

Alcohol – Fact Sheet for Legislators

- Underage drinking costs $1.2 Billion in Georgia in 2013.
- In 2019, 8.5% of high school students in Georgia report drinking alcohol in past 30-days, down from 12.8% in 2018.
- In 2019, 4% of high school students in Georgia report binge drinking in the past 30-days, down from 6% in 2018.
- Youth who begin drinking before 15 are 5x more likely to abuse or become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking after 21, and in 2019, 18.2% of GA high schoolers reported that they had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before the age of 15.
- Most alcoholics in America begin drinking before age 18.

Social Host Liability

- An adult allowing underage drinking on property they own, rent, or lease is referred to as a “Social Host”.
- 11.4% of GA high school students reported they have used alcohol at home.
- There are gaps in the current laws. Social host laws hold adult hosts accountable by allowing police to issue misdemeanor citations with fines attached to any adult who permits underage drinking in their home or on their property.
- Current Georgia laws only hold accountable an individual that gives an underage person alcohol if they know that they will be driving.
- 35 States have adopted Social Host Laws including our contiguous states.

Alcohol and the Teen Brain

- Alcohol use interrupts normal brain “wiring” by slowing down brain activity and development.
- The brain continues to develop into adulthood and undergoes dramatic changes during adolescence. Introducing drugs during this period of development may cause brain changes that have profound and long-lasting consequences.
- The brain goes through dynamic change during adolescence (ages 12 to 21) and alcohol can seriously damage. Excessive alcohol use can lead to learning and memory problems, including dementia and poor school performance.

TIPS ON TALKING WITH YOUR SENATOR AND REPRESENTATIVE IN PERSON

Talking to an elected official may seem intimidating at first, but it is important to remember that it is a normal part of their job. Especially if you live in their district they want to know what you think and if they can help. Below are some tips on how you can increase your effectiveness in communicating with your senator and representative with the goal of establishing a long-term relationship.

In Person

Prior to the Meeting

- **Do Some Homework**
  - Try to know the basics about the topic you are going to address. Be able to articulate what you are concerned about and why. Practice your “elevator speech” before you meet with your senator and representative or the staff member who works for them. Begin by thanking them for what they do. An “elevator speech” is a 1-2 minute speech that explains what you want and why you want it. It is called this because it needs to be very short. You may have more time to make your points, but you always need to be prepared to make your pitch quickly, especially if you are meeting them “at the ropes”.
  - **Call your senator’s and representative’s offices and ask to speak to your legislator. Be sure to tell them you live in the legislator’s district. If they are not available than speak with their staff member who schedules the legislator’s time. Ask them to schedule an appointment for you with the legislator on February 20th between 11:15a.m. and 12:45pm.**
    - Don’t feel slighted if you don’t get to speak to the legislator. Legislative staff members work very closely with the legislator and they are good allies to have.

What to Take with You

- Business Cards
- The Fact Sheet for Legislators handout on your topic provided by Voices for Prevention. This document provides the key information you want them to learn about. Give a copy to your legislator.

How to Address your Legislator:

When addressing a member of the state legislature use the following protocols:

- Senator: “Senator (last name)”
- Member of the House of Representatives: “Representative (last name)”
- Governor: “Governor (last name)”
- Lt. Governor: “Lt. Governor (last name)”
- Speaker of the House: “Mr. Speaker”
- Committee Chairman or Chairwoman “Chairman (last name), or Madam Chair “(last name)”
Be Personal
- Tell them a little about yourself—where you live, what you do for a living, if you are representing yourself or an organization
- Be sure to tell them that you live and/or work in their district

Refer to Fact Sheet for Legislators handout
- If possible refer to at least one piece of data that will support your perspective. Select one key piece of data that helps sell your perspective. Don’t drown them in data; your handout can provide them with additional data.

Be Focused
- Remember they have only a few minutes to spend with you so stay on topic. Also, don’t let the legislator change the subject either. Be polite, but be firm.

Be Positive
- Don’t be argumentative. You may not agree with the stand your legislator is taking on this particular issue, but it is important not to burn any bridges. Little is gained by arguing with your legislator. Mention how this issue affects children and families in their district.
- Don’t be defensive. They may ask tough questions. They are probably asking the questions that will be asked of them. Give them solid information that will help them justify why they should support your issue. Always remember that you have the right to participate in the education of your legislators.
- Remember your goal is to have a long-term relationship. You won’t always agree with your legislator. You are looking for common ground on the issues in which you are interested.

Make the Ask
- Don’t leave without asking them to support your topic.
- Let them know you are always willing to help them with information any time. Ask them if they have any questions for you.

End the Meeting
- Don’t stay too long
- Thank them for their time and attention

Follow-up
- Send a thank you note and anything else you promised them.
- Consider inviting them to your facility or to gather with children and/or parents and/or families you serve to let them see and hear first-hand what is needed for the community.
Alcohol Use and Your Health

Drinking too much can harm your health. Excessive alcohol use leads to about 88,000 deaths in the United States each year, and shortens the life of those who die by almost 30 years. Further, excessive drinking cost the economy $249 billion in 2010. Most excessive drinkers are not alcohol dependent.

What is considered a “drink”? U.S. Standard Drink Sizes

- 12 ounces 5% ABV beer
- 8 ounces 7% ABV malt liquor
- 5 ounces 12% ABV wine
- 1.5 ounces 40% ABV (80 proof) distilled spirits
  (examples: gin, rum, vodka, whiskey)

Excessive alcohol use includes:

- **Binge Drinking**
  - For women, 4 or more drinks consumed on one occasion
  - For men, 5 or more drinks consumed on one occasion

- **Heavy Drinking**
  - For women, 8 or more drinks per week
  - For men, 15 or more drinks per week

- **Any alcohol used by pregnant women**

- **Any alcohol used by those under the age of 21 years**

If you choose to drink, do so in moderation:

- **FOR WOMEN**, up to 1 drink a day
- **FOR MEN**, up to 2 drinks a day

**DON’T DRINK AT ALL** if you are under the age of 21, or if you are or may be pregnant, or have health problems that could be made worse by drinking.

**NO ONE** should begin drinking or drink more frequently based on potential health benefits.
Excessive alcohol use has immediate effects that increase the risk of many harmful health conditions. These are most often the result of binge drinking. Over time, excessive alcohol use can lead to the development of chronic diseases and other serious problems.

**Short-Term Health Risks**

**Injuries**
- Motor vehicle crashes
- Falls
- Drownings
- Burns

**Violence**
- Homicide
- Suicide
- Sexual assault
- Intimate partner violence

**Alcohol poisoning**

**Reproductive health**
- Risky sexual behaviors
- Unintended pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV
- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth
- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs)

**Long-Term Health Risks**

**Chronic diseases**
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Liver disease
- Digestive problems

**Cancers**
- Breast
- Mouth and throat
- Liver
- Colon

**Learning and memory problems**
- Dementia
- Poor school performance

**Mental health**
- Depression
- Anxiety

**Social problems**
- Lost productivity
- Family problems
- Unemployment

**Alcohol dependence**

Fact Sheets - Underage Drinking

Underage Drinking
Alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug among youth in the United States.\(^1\)

- Excessive drinking is responsible for more than 4,300 deaths among underage youth each year, and cost the U.S. $24 billion in economic costs in 2010.\(^2,3\)
- Although the purchase of alcohol by persons under the age of 21 is illegal, people aged 12 to 20 years drink 11% of all alcohol consumed in the United States.\(^4\) More than 90% of this alcohol is consumed in the form of binge drinks.\(^4\)
- On average, underage drinkers consume more drinks per drinking occasion than adult drinkers.\(^5\)
- In 2013, there were approximately 119,000 emergency rooms visits by persons aged 12 to 21 for injuries and other conditions linked to alcohol.\(^6\)

Drinking Levels among Youth
The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey\(^7\) found that among high school students, during the past 30 days

- 30% drank some amount of alcohol.
- 14% binge drank.
- 6% drove after drinking alcohol.
- 17% rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.

Other national surveys
- In 2016, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health\(\text{external icon}\) reported that 19% of youth aged 12 to 20 years drink alcohol and 12% reported binge drinking in the past 30 days.\(^8\)
- In 2017, the Monitoring the Future Survey\(\text{external icon}\) reported that 8% of 8th graders and 33% of 12th graders drank during the past 30 days, and 2% of 8th graders and 19% of 12th graders binge drank during the past 30 days.\(^9\)

Consequences of Underage Drinking
Youth who drink alcohol\(^1,5,10\) are more likely to experience

- School problems, such as higher absence and poor or failing grades.
- Social problems, such as fighting and lack of participation in youth activities.
- Legal problems, such as arrest for driving or physically hurting someone while drunk.
- Physical problems, such as hangovers or illnesses.
- Unwanted, unplanned, and unprotected sexual activity.
- Disruption of normal growth and sexual development.
- Physical and sexual assault.
- Higher risk for suicide and homicide.
- Alcohol-related car crashes and other unintentional injuries, such as burns, falls, and drowning.
- Memory problems.
- Abuse of other drugs.
- Changes in brain development that may have life-long effects.
- Death from alcohol poisoning.

In general, the risk of youth experiencing these problems is greater for those who binge drink than for those who do not binge drink. Early initiation of drinking is associated with development of an alcohol use disorder later in life.

Prevention of Underage Drinking
Reducing underage drinking will require community-based efforts to monitor the activities of youth and decrease youth access to alcohol. Recent publications by the Surgeon General and the Institute of Medicine outlined many prevention strategies for the prevention of underage drinking, such as enforcement of minimum legal drinking age laws, national media campaigns targeting youth and adults, increasing alcohol excise taxes, reducing youth exposure to alcohol advertising, and development of comprehensive community-based programs.

References:


Content source: Division of Population Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
A human brain takes about 23-25 years to fully develop.

Latest studies show that alcohol damages the teenage brain.

The brain hippocampus (responsible for learning and memory) can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers.

Alcohol use interrupts normal brain “wiring” by slowing down brain activity and development.

Alcohol interferes with storing new information as memories.

When adults provide alcohol or allow underage drinking it actually results in:

- more drinking outside the home
- more alcohol related problems
- more involvement in other high risk behaviors

Most alcoholics in America began drinking before age 18.

11% of all alcohol is consumed by 12 to 20 year olds in the U.S.

A majority of sexual assaults are alcohol-related.

The Myths and Realities of Underage Drinking

**Myth:** “Teens are going to drink anyway – it’s a rite of passage.”

**Reality:** Most teens do NOT drink. 70% of high school students and 93% middle school students said that they do not drink alcoholic beverages.

Misperceptions that “everybody’s doing it” actually make youth more likely to drink. On the other hand, when these misperceptions are corrected, and teens realize that “NOT everybody’s doing it”, they are less likely to drink alcohol.

**Myth:** “It’s better for kids to start drinking young, so they learn how to handle it.”

**Reality:** The teenage brain is still developing – especially the part of the brain that deals with decision-making. Underage drinking places teens at a higher risk for academic failure, depression, suicide, sexual assault, teen pregnancy, and other substance abuse. Young drinkers are also more likely to develop alcohol dependence.

**Myth:** “It’s safer for teens to drink at my home than elsewhere.”

**Reality:** Adult supervised drinking actually results in more overall drinking in places other than home. Also, serving alcohol to anyone under 21 is illegal, putting you at risk for criminal charges and civil lawsuits, especially if someone is injured or property is damaged.

**Myth:** “In Europe, teens drink more responsibly than in the U.S. because they start drinking younger.”

**Reality:** European teens actually drink and get drunk more often than American teens and have higher rates of alcohol related problems.

Information used with permission from www.21reasons.org, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (funded by OJJDP, November 2009), and National Center on Addiction & Substance Abuse (CASA).
Parents are the #1 influence in a teen’s decision not to drink.

What YOU Can Do To Prevent Underage Drinking

- Eat dinner together regularly.
- Be caring and supportive.
- Maintain open lines of communication.
- Set no-drinking rules and consequences. Be consistent with them.
- Surround your child with positive role models.
- Teens need parents to be parents, not drinking partners.
- Keep track of the alcohol in your home. Count it and lock it up.
- Check in with your teens about their plans and ask about alcohol.
- Be up and ready at curfew; talk with your teens about their night.
- Learn the signs and symptoms of alcohol abuse. If problems occur, get help promptly.

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