



Binge Drinking

Alcohol is the substance used most commonly by children and adolescents in the United States. Its use is associated with the leading causes of death among youth. Drinking that may cause little or no problem for adults can be very dangerous for adolescents. Recent studies indicate that adolescents who use alcohol during this period of rapid [brain development](#) may interrupt key neural processes. This interruption could lead to cognitive impairment and an elevated risk of developing a chronic use disorder. Binge drinking is even more dangerous than other types of alcohol use.

Scope of the Problem

21% of youth admit to having more than a sip of alcohol before the age of 13 and 79% have done so by 12th grade. Even more problematically, the proportion of young people who drink heavily is much higher than among adults who drink. Approximately 50% of 12-14 year olds and 79% of those aged 18-20 who drink do so heavily. Nearly 44% of binge drinking sessions among those aged 13-20 included the use of hard liquors, especially vodka. Less than a third of binge drinking sessions included beer.

Why do Adolescents Drink?

Researchers have found that the anticipated effects of alcohol use, referred to as "alcohol expectancies," play a central role in the decision-making process for children and adolescents. Advertising creates positive expectancies. Parents who teach their children about the potential

negative outcomes may find their message diluted or overwritten as adolescents become older. This may also reflect the influence adult drinking has on youths and the fact that youths often obtain alcohol from adults. Additionally, drinking motives and a child's peer group provide other risk factors. Researchers are also investigating the biological basis and pharmacokinetics (the way the body processes alcohol).

Consequences of Binge Drinking

Consequences of excessive drinking include: unintentional injuries, violence, liver disease, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, various cancers, reduced cognitive function, and alcohol dependence. Binge drinking is associated with higher risk of acquiring HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Women may experience unintended pregnancies, miscarriages, and low birth weight as a result of alcohol use or binge drinking. Women who binge drink also have a higher risk of exposing a developing fetus to high blood alcohol concentrations. This may increase the risk for SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

Drinking exposes teens to additional risks compared to adults. The earlier someone tries a substance, the more likely that s/he will develop a diagnosable problem with that substance.

Alcohol use in any amount is illegal for people under 21. If you know a teen who is misusing alcohol, [ASAP](#) can help. Call us to get information or to schedule an assessment.