



## Effects of Alcohol

### What effect does alcohol have on the body?

The effects of alcohol depend on the amount consumed, body size, and tolerance. Repeated or chronic use of alcohol results in damage to the brain, liver and stomach. The effects of alcohol can range from a mild, relaxed euphoria to mental confusion, respiratory depression and death.

### Why does alcohol harm our youth even more than adults?

**Physically** – Because of the changes occurring throughout their brains, adolescents may be less sensitive to certain drug effects but more sensitive to other effects of drugs. In the case of alcohol, adolescents appear to be less sensitive to the effect alcohol has on their ability to self-monitor their level of intoxication, thus permitting high levels of intake associated with binge drinking. Yet, adolescents are more sensitive to the alcohol-induced disruptions in learning, memory, judgment and motor skills.

**Behaviorally** – Teens cannot judge their own limits. Alcohol has been responsible for countless injuries and deaths by car crashes, falls, fighting, drowning, and alcohol poisoning.

**Emotionally** – New, strong and puzzling feelings are normal for teenagers. Stress and tension are common. Alcohol abuse can block emotional growth, drive friends away, and lead to feelings of failure.

**Sexually** – Teenagers must learn to make adult choices about sex. Alcohol turns off judgment, leading to promiscuous sex, unintended pregnancies, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

**Academically** – Lack of concentration and motivation, missed assignments, and truancy are signs of drug or alcohol use and often results in students dropping out of school.

**Legally** – Drunken behavior including driving can lead to a police record. Driving under the influence or having passengers who are drunk can result in the loss of driver's license and insurance coverage. Sixty percent of crimes in Allen County by juveniles are committed while the juvenile is under the influence of alcohol or an illegal substance.

## The Adolescent Brain is Vulnerable

Brain development is a life-long process with rapid periods of change prior to birth, during the infant years, and during the teen years. The regions of the brain that are critical for learning, decision-making, and judgment provide kids with the ability to plan, execute plans, solve complex problems, and integrate feelings. These brain regions are undergoing pronounced transformation during the teen years and are very sensitive to alcohol and other drugs. Recent studies of the brain are indicating that teens are not "young adults." A teen's brain responds differently to alcohol and other drugs and may be less resilient to the negative effects of substances. There is no safe or legal amount of alcohol for teen-aged brains.

For kids to have more energy and achieve their best, they need to keep their developing brains healthy. Use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs during the teen years can have a negative impact on brain development that will last into adulthood.

# Underage Drinking

The Surgeon General is the Nation's top doctor and public health officer. The President of the United States appoints the Surgeon General to help protect and promote the health of the nation.

The Surgeon General lets people across the country know the latest news on how to get healthy and stay healthy. He explains how to avoid illness and injury.

When a health topic needs special attention, the Surgeon General issues a national call to action to everyone in America. The *Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* (2007) explains why underage alcohol use is a major public health and safety issue. It asks everyone to take action.

You too can take action in your family and in your community! Start by knowing the facts!

- More teens drink alcohol than smoke or use drugs.
- Drinking alcohol can harm the growing body and brain.
- Approximately 10% of 12-year-olds say they have used alcohol at least once.
- Approximately 20% of 13-year-olds say they have used alcohol at least once.
- Approximately 50% of 15-year-olds say they have used alcohol at least once.
- Alcohol dependence rates are highest among young people between the ages of 18 and 20, and they aren't even old enough to be drinking legally.
- Most young people who start drinking before the age of 21 do so when they are about 13-14 years old.
- Early drinking can cause later alcohol problems. Of adults who started drinking before the age of 15, around 40% say they have signs of alcohol dependence.
- Rates of death and injury nearly triple between the early teen years and early adult life due to dangerous activities, especially related to underage drinking.