



ALCOHOL AWARENESS AND UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION MONTH

April 18, 2024 – This April, District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) is observing Alcohol Awareness and Underage Drinking Prevention Month.

According to the National Institute of Health:

- In the United States, over 140,000 people die per year from alcohol misuse.
- Alcohol misuse is associated with over 200 disease and injury-related conditions.

The 2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health collected the following data on youth drinking behaviors:

- 5.7 million youth ages 12 to 17 (22.3% in this age group) reported that they drank alcohol at some point in their lifetime.
- 4.3 million youth ages 12 to 17 (16.7% in this age group) reported that they drank in the past year.
- 1.8 million youth ages 12 to 17 (6.8% in this age group) reported that they drank in the past month.

Alcohol is a toxic, psychoactive substance. It is a central nervous system depressant, slowing down brain activity and affecting mood, coordination, and impulse control. There is no safe amount of alcohol that can be consumed, and a glass of red wine a day is no longer recommended by medical professionals. Alcohol is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen, which is the highest risk group. It is linked to liver, mouth, throat, stomach, bowel, and female breast cancer, among other types.

Besides cancer, alcohol can increase the risk of drowning and obtaining injuries from violence, falls, and motor vehicle crashes. Additionally, it can raise blood pressure and can contribute to the risk of heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and digestive issues.

Alcohol misuse is defined as alcohol consumption that puts one at increased risk for harm. For men, this is generally more than 4 drinks per day; for women, this is generally more than three drinks per day. Alcohol use disorder differs from alcohol misuse in that it is a chronic condition characterized by addiction, or biochemical changes in the brain. This disorder, also known as alcoholism or an alcohol addiction, is associated with alcohol tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and loss of control.

Adolescents are more vulnerable to addiction than adults because of the developmental changes happening in their brains during this time. Teens who drink alcohol are more likely than their alcohol-avoiding peers to face problems in school and in their relationships, legal issues, and physical and sexual violence. Alcohol use can cause permanent changes in brain development that have negative lifelong effects. Additionally, teens who drink are more likely to misuse other substances and are at an increased risk for suicide and homicide.



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Parents play an important role in reducing youth alcohol use by modeling healthy behaviors and being a source for information and guidance to their children. Parents can use the following tips from TalkSooner to guide conversations about alcohol use with their teens:

- Listen: Allow teens to express their opinions, feelings, and questions.
- Keep it casual: Allow these conversations to happen over dinner or during a drive.
- Watch your language: Use open-ended questions to encourage critical thinking and help coach them through hypothetical scenarios.
- Show support and offer help: Make sure they know they can come to you for advice.
- Set clear and realistic expectations for your teens.
- Be ready to answer tough questions: Teens will want to know why. Have the facts ready.

Find more talking tips from TalkSooner here: <https://talksooner.org/talking-tips>

In addition, finding healthy ways to manage stress is a preventative measure that teens can use to avoid consuming alcohol. Healthy stress management techniques can include meditation, physical activity, leaning on support from loved ones, listening to music, and more.

If you or someone you know is experiencing alcohol use disorder, SAMHSA's National Helpline is free and available 24/7 at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for treatment referrals and information in both English and Spanish.

If you are having thoughts of suicide, call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. Help is available 24/7 at no cost.

DHD#10 also has information available at <https://www.dhd10.org/parents-families/substance-use-prevention/>.

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