

Alcohol Risks for Teens

Some effects of underage drinking happen right away while others wait to appear later in life. Even if you trust your children and how they act, there are still many things you should know.

Physical and Emotional Risks

According to The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking (2007), underage drinking:

- Increases the risk of physical and sexual assault.
- Is associated with poor grades, illegal drug use and tobacco use.
- Can cause a range of physical problems ranging from hangovers to death from alcohol poisoning.
- May affect a teen's developing brain, which continues to grow until the late 20s.
- Is a risk factor for heavy drinking later in life.

Sexual Activity

In Vermont, out of the 8th – 12th grade students who reported having had sex, one in five said they used alcohol before their most recent sexual experience.¹

Alcohol Dependence

Youth who drink before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21. Studies have shown that two out of five kids who begin drinking before age 15 will develop alcohol abuse or dependence at some point in their lives. When they wait until they are 21, the risk for alcohol dependence drops to only one out of ten.²

Injury

Alcohol-related traffic crashes are the leading cause of death and disability among teenagers. Alcohol is also a major factor in other leading causes of violence, unintentional injuries, risky sexual behavior, homicide and suicide.³

Suicide

Over three out of ten adolescent and adult suicide victims (attempted or completed) test positive for alcohol.⁴

Legal

Teens face a range of legal consequences related to alcohol use, including fines, suspension of driver's license and even jail time.

For more information about the risks and consequences of underage drinking, visit parentupvt.org or dial 211.

¹ 2009 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

² Hingson, R. W., Heeren, T., & Winter, M. R. (2006). *Age at drinking onset and alcohol dependence*. Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 160, 739-846.

³ R. E. Dahl, *Adolescent brain development: A period of vulnerabilities and opportunities*, (Keynote address) Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 1021 (2004).

⁴ Bennett & Collins, 2000; Smith et al., 1999.