

PARENTS—SPRING BREAK IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT TIME TO DISCUSS COLLEGE DRINKING

For many students, spring break is a carefree time away from classroom pressures. Unfortunately, for many it is also a time of excessive drinking and dealing with its aftermath—violence, sexual aggression, and even death. As your college-age sons and daughters prepare to celebrate their spring break escape, take the opportunity to talk with them about the consequences of drinking. During these conversations, it is critical to discuss how alcohol affects the body and how long these effects can last.

THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ARE COMPLEX

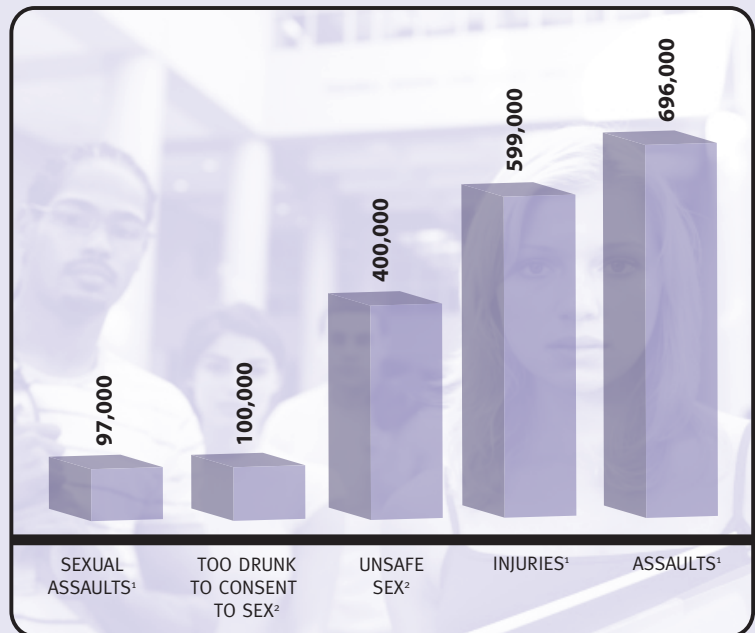
Alcohol acts as both a stimulant and a depressant. So while people who drink may temporarily feel elated and happy, the feeling does not last and alcohol's depressive effects take over. Discuss the following risks with your college-age sons and daughters:

- Their inhibitions and memory soon become affected, so they could say and do things they might regret or might not remember doing at all.
- Their decision-making skills are also affected. They may become restless and aggressive. They may be more inclined to get into fights, trash a house, or make unwise decisions about sex.
- Their physical control is affected as well—they can experience loss of balance, slurred speech, or blurred vision.

It's important to remember, too, that

- Critical driving skills and decision-making abilities are diminished long before someone begins to show the obvious physical signs of intoxication. As your college-age son or daughter consumes more alcohol, fine motor skills and reaction time begin to suffer. This compromises driving abilities even further and increases the risk of having an alcohol-related traffic crash.
- Young people are less sensitive than older adults to alcohol's effects on alertness, so they can drink longer before feeling drowsy. But that is exactly when many serious problems occur. Under the influence of alcohol, even normal activities such as swimming, running, or just crossing a busy street can become truly dangerous—and potentially life-threatening.

Alcohol and College Students— A Dangerous Mix



Sources:

- 1) Hingson R, Heeren T, Winter M, Wechsler H. Magnitude of alcohol-related mortality and morbidity among U.S. college students ages 18-24: Changes from 1998 to 2001. *Annual Review of Public Health* 26:259-279, 2005.
- 2) Hingson RW, Heeren T, Zakocs RC, Kopstein A, Wechsler H. Magnitude of alcohol-related mortality and morbidity among U.S. college students ages 18-24. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 63(2):136-144, 2002.



UNDERSTANDING ALCOHOL POISONING

Before spring break begins, take a few minutes to talk with your college-age sons and daughters about the dangers of alcohol poisoning.

What is it? Alcohol depresses the nerves that control breathing and the gag reflex, which prevents choking. Someone who drinks a fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop breathing. Even someone who survives an alcohol overdose can suffer irreversible brain damage. Binge drinking, which often happens with a bet or a dare, is especially dangerous because the victim can drink a fatal dose **before** losing consciousness.

Blood alcohol concentration can continue to rise while someone is passed out. Also, even after a person stops drinking, the alcohol already in the stomach and the intestine continues to enter the bloodstream and circulates throughout the body. Someone who appears to be sleeping it off could actually be in real danger.

What should I look for? Signs of alcohol poisoning include mental confusion, stupor, coma, or the inability to be roused; vomiting; seizures; slow (fewer than eight breaths per minute) or irregular (10 seconds or more between breaths) breathing; and hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, and paleness.

What should I do? Know the danger signals. If you suspect an alcohol overdose or alcohol poisoning, don't wait for all the critical signs to appear. Call 911 immediately.

- Eventually, everyone who drinks to excess—including young adults—will get sleepy and pass out. They could then vomit and choke to death or simply stop breathing because reflexes like gagging and breathing can become suppressed.

TALK WITH YOUR COLLEGE-AGE SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Research shows that parents **do** make a difference. Talking with your college-age sons and daughters about alcohol now could prevent serious problems later.

Drinking too much can mean trips to the emergency room, arrests, sexual assaults, and putting themselves and their friends in real danger. Ask them to consider—is that any way to celebrate?

RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE

For parents who want to talk to their college-age sons and daughters about the consequences of drinking, a variety of helpful resources are available from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

A special guide for parents offers research-based information on understanding the need to stay involved and knowing how to get help if faced with an alcohol-related crisis.

The website of the NIAAA Task Force on College Drinking, www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov, features this guide along with links to alcohol policies at colleges across the country, an interactive diagram of the human body and how alcohol affects it, an interactive alcohol cost calculator, and the full text of all Task Force materials.

Copies of all materials, including the parents' guide, can be ordered from the website or from the NIAAA Publications Distribution Center, P.O. Box 10686, Rockville, MD 20849-0686.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit

www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov

