Fact Sheet: Teens and alcohol

Overview

- 87 percent of high school seniors have used alcohol. In comparison, 63 percent have smoked cigarettes; 32 percent have used marijuana; and only 6 percent have used cocaine.

- Approximately two in three teenagers who drink report that they can buy their own alcoholic beverages.

- Use of alcohol and other drugs is associated with the leading causes of death and injury (e.g., motor-vehicle crashes, homicides, and suicides) among teenagers and young adults.

- Alcohol and other drug use at an early age is an indicator of future drug or alcohol problems.

Usage rates and patterns

- First use of alcohol typically begins around the age of 13.

- Junior and senior high school students drink 35 percent of all wine coolers sold in the United States; they also consume 1.1 billion cans of beer.

- Approximately 7 percent of the nation’s eighth graders, 18 percent of tenth graders; and 30 percent of twelfth graders report they have been drunk during the last month.

- Among teenagers who “binge” drink (consuming five or more drinks in a row on a single occasion), 39 percent say they drink alone; 58 percent drink when they are upset; 30 percent drink when they are bored; and 37 percent drink to feel high.

- Though male high school seniors “binge” drink in greater numbers than females, the deference has been diminishing gradually during the last decade.

- 41 percent of college students have “binged” on alcohol during the past two weeks.

Negative consequences

- Drivers under the age of 25 were more likely than those 25 or older to be intoxicated in a fatal crash.
- In 1991, nearly 10 percent (more than 126,000) of the clients admitted to state-funded alcohol treatment programs were under the age of 21.

- A clear relationship exists between alcohol use and grade-point average among college students: students with GPAs of D or F drink three times as much as those who achieve As.

- 31.9 percent of youth under 18 in long-term, state-operated juvenile institutions in 1987 were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the arrest.

- Almost half of college students who said they had been victims of crime admitted they had used drugs or alcohol before the crime occurred.

- Researchers estimate that alcohol use is implicated in one- to two-thirds of sexual assault and acquaintance or “date rape” cases among teens and college students.

- Among sexually active teens, those who average five or more drinks daily were nearly three times less likely to use condoms, putting them at greater risk for HIV infection.

- Among all teens who drink, 16 percent use condoms less often after drinking.

**Perceptions, influences**

- Almost 80 percent of teenagers don’t know that a 12 oz. can of beer has the same amount of alcohol as a shot of whiskey; 55 percent don’t know that a 5 oz. glass of wine and a can of beer have the same amount.

- 56 percent of students in grades five to twelve say that alcohol advertising encourages them to drink.

- 35 percent of children in the fourth grade report having been pressured by their classmates to drink; by the time they reach sixth grade, 49 percent have been pressured.