



Under the Influence

FINDINGS ON ALCOHOL USE AMONG ARLINGTON TEENS

From the March 2010 Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Arlington, Virginia

The choices that young people make today have a big impact on their health and well-being, now and in the future.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest link to their health.

This brochure looks at data on teen alcohol use from Arlington's March 2007 survey of middle and high school students. The data suggest that use and over-use of alcohol are far too common among young people in Arlington.

*Nobody is too young (or too old) to have trouble with booze.
Alcoholics Anonymous*

WHY WORRY?

Some adults still dismiss teen alcohol use as a harmless rite of passage. But the science is clear – alcohol is a powerful drug that affects the body, brain, and self-control. Its effects are especially damaging to developing adolescent bodies and brains.

Drinking alcohol leads to

- Slower reflexes, loss of coordination, distorted vision, and memory lapses;
- Poor judgment and bad choices;
- Damage to brain, liver and other organs.

Drinking a lot at one time or very quickly can cause alcohol poisoning, which can lead to coma or death. Mixing alcohol with *any other* drug (even common, over-the-counter drugs) can also be lethal. And drinking and driving is still a leading cause of death among teens.

TEEN BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Recent research shows one of the most important times for brain development is between the ages of 10 and 20. Because adolescent brains are still developing, alcohol affects teens differently than adults. Teens are at greater risk for addiction and teen alcohol use can affect how a teen learns and uses information. Teen alcohol use can also lower verbal and motor skills. Developing brains and alcohol are a bad mix!

EARLY USE IS RISKY

As with other drugs, the earlier that use begins, the greater the risk that a young person develops a serious problem with alcohol. Among Arlington 8th graders, about *one in six* reported that they began drinking before the age of 13, which places them in the *high risk* category. Use of alcohol can also short-circuit emotional maturity, social skills, and self-confidence – all of which are crucial for healthy development.

USE OF ALCOHOL

- In 2010, 43 percent of young people surveyed had tried alcohol at least once. Just over one-fourth had used alcohol in the past month.
- Among *high school students*, 67 percent had tried alcohol; 38 percent had used alcohol in the past month; and 22 percent had engaged in binge drinking.
- Girls were slightly more likely than boys to report alcohol use, although boys were more likely to binge drink.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Despite many messages about the dangers of drinking and driving, thirteen percent of 12th grade students reported that in the previous *month* they had driven a car after drinking alcohol and over one-fourth reported riding with a driver who had been drinking. Among 10th grade students, 5 percent reported that in the previous *month* they had driven a car after drinking and nearly one-fifth reported riding with a driver who had been using alcohol.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

Since 2007, current use of alcohol (defined as in the past month) has fallen from 25 to 22 percent. Current use decreased across all grades, with the most dramatic decrease (12%) occurring among 12th grade students.

BELIEFS ABOUT ALCOHOL

Teen use of alcohol is influenced by how easily young people can get alcohol, what they think about the risks of drinking, and their beliefs about alcohol use by their peers. Among Arlington youth:

- Thirty-nine percent of young people agreed that alcohol is easy to get. This figure increases from 18 percent of 6th graders to 56 percent of 12th grade students.
- 75% of youth agreed that drinking once a month or more can cause physical harm and/or problems with family or school.
- Only two percent of youth in 6th grade believe that most or all of their peers are using alcohol.

HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2850 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington Public Schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their children. Less than one percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled one out. Most of those who did not were absent from school. Each question on alcohol specifically excluded a sip of wine for religious purposes.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Take a stand: Be clear that teen alcohol use is not acceptable. Do not serve alcohol to anyone under 21.

Talk, talk, talk: Parents and other influential adults need to talk to teens about alcohol on a regular basis. Ask your teens what they know about alcohol and what they think about teen drinking. Listen carefully without interrupting. Help them practice refusing alcohol.

Model moderate drinking: According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture), drinking in moderation means no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two per day for men.

Monitor: Know where your teens are. Get to know their friends and the parents of those friends. Be awake when your child comes home.

Get the facts: Make sure your teen knows:

- Alcohol is a powerful drug that slows down mind and body, especially in adolescence.
- People, especially teens, tend to be very bad at judging how seriously alcohol has harmed their vision, clouded their thinking, and slowed their reaction time.
- Alcohol use is associated with many dangerous situations for teens including delinquency, fighting, and being a victim of date rape.
- If there is a family history of alcoholism, your teen may be at greater risk for developing a drinking problem.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

On alcohol use and alcoholism:

READY Coalition – Arlington’s community effort to reduce teen use of alcohol and other drugs. For more information, contact Kate McCauley at ready@arlingtonva.us or go to the Coalition web site: www.readycoalition.org

Alcohol and Drug Use (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) at www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/alcoholdrug/index.htm

Keep Kids Alcohol Free: Strategies for Action (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism) at www.alcoholfreechildren.org/files/pubs/html/prev.htm

A Message to Teenagers: How to Tell When Drinking is Becoming a Problem (Alcoholics Anonymous) at www.aa.org/catalog.cfm?origpage=15&product=94

Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families
2100 Washington Blvd, 3rd floor
Arlington, VA 22204
Phone (703) 228-1667
www.arlingtonpartnershipforyouth.org