



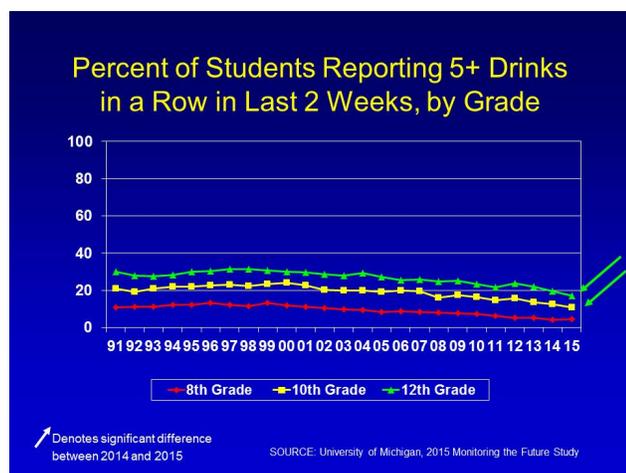
August 2016 Newsletter

Let's Make the Problem of Underage Drinking a Thing of the Past!

By Pamela S. Erickson

We are making great progress on reducing underage drinking. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), "This year's Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey of drug use and attitudes among American 8th, 10th, and 12th graders continues to show encouraging news, with decreasing use of alcohol, cigarettes, and many illicit drugs over the last 5 years—many to their lowest levels since this survey's inception..."

Just look at this. Binge drinking has continued to drop to the point where it is below 20% in all grade levels.



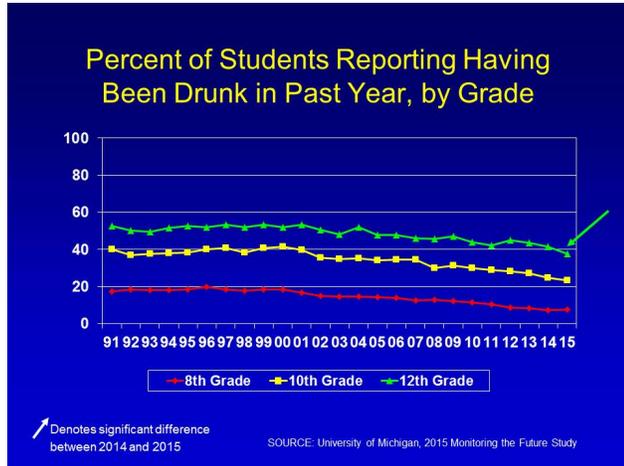
In 2003, the National Research Council of the Institute of Medicine called for a "Collective Responsibility" to reduce this serious problem. At that time, they said, "By the time children are seniors in high school, about 30 percent are drinking heavily at least once a month." They urged parents and adults to take up the challenge. They called for strategies centered on adults and parents versus peppering kids with anti-drinking messages. "We have to resolve, as a national community, to reduce underage drinking and the problems associated with it and to take comprehensive measures to achieve this goal."

Today we can acknowledge that our communities have responded and achieved major successes. Hundreds of local coalitions have worked on this issue. Campaigns have engaged parents to use their considerable influence to establish clear rules against underage drinking and drug use; to talk to their kids early and often about the dangers of substance abuse and to monitor their kids activities. Parents, kids, law enforcement, prevention professionals and local leaders deserve a lot of appreciation for their efforts.

But, we aren't finished yet. It is sometimes tempting to move on to other issues when some success has been achieved. And, certainly there are new concerns about rising use and abuse by children of marijuana and prescription drugs. Nevertheless, alcohol is still the most widely used and abused drug for our kids. And, a lot of kids are still getting drunk. We know how important it is to curtail this

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problem as regular alcohol use damages developing adolescent brains and is associated with a whole host of other problems.



One thought is to look at Rotary Clubs' effort to eradicate polio as a model to follow. Rotary International and its partners have been working on this issue since 1988. This disease affects the potential of our world's youth. As the World Health Organization notes, "Polio mainly affects children under 5 years of age. 1 in 200 infections leads to irreversible paralysis. Among those paralyzed, 5% to 10% die when their breathing muscles become immobilized."

Thanks to the work by Rotary Clubs and their partners, polio cases have decreased by over 99% since 1988 from 350,000 to 74 in 2015!

But Rotary's 34,000 clubs are quite serious about eradication even though there were less than 100 cases in two countries. They are busy raising several million dollars to complete the job. (As a Rotarian, I hear

about this all the time at club meetings and in publications!)

Let's do the same for underage drinking. This problem continues to damage our children. In 2010, there were 4,300 underage deaths due to alcohol. That is way too many...and college drinking continues at high levels impacting the academic success of our youth.

It is time to make underage drinking a thing of the past. Laws that keep the alcohol industry regulated are important to create a safe environment for kids. Laws that address underage use or adult misuse all need to remain top of mind to prevent problems. Parents, local coalitions, prevention professionals and law enforcement are doing a great job in reducing this problem. We just need to keep up the effort.

Sources:

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<http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/polio/en/>

[https://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2003/Reducing-Underage-Drinking-A-Collective-Responsibility/ReducingUnderageDrinking.pdf](https://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2003/Reducing-Underage-Drinking-A-Collective-Responsibility/ReducingUnderageDrinking.pdf)

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