

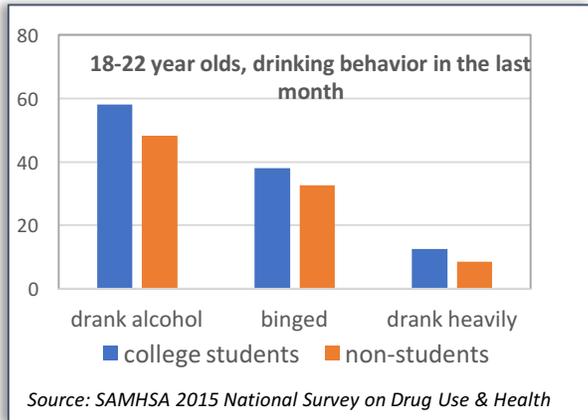


April 2018 Newsletter

Alcohol Awareness Month and College Drinking

By Lise Gervais

April is Alcohol Awareness month and it seems like many young people are getting the message. The good news is that they're drinking less than previous generations. Surveys of 8th, 10th and 12th graders show that rates have been steadily declining. The current cohort of college students are consuming less alcohol than in previous years, and their non-student peers are drinking even less.



There is speculation that the “Generation Z” cohort tend to be conscientious about what they consume and are not interested in repeating the embarrassing antics of earlier generations. They seem to be more accepting of others’ choices, including not drinking.

But overuse of alcohol is still taking a big toll on college campuses. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:

- About 696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.
- About 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report experiencing alcohol-related sexual assault.
- About 1,825 college students between the ages of

18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor-vehicle crashes.

The drinking culture can vary from college to college but at schools where spectator sports are big, drinking rates tend to be higher. A study on the correlation between March Madness participation and college drinking found that one-third of students over 21 and one-fourth of underage students engaged in binge drinking when the school team was part of the NCAA Tournament. They also found that when alcohol was less available at sporting events there were fewer “arrests, assaults, ejections from the stadium, and student referrals to the judicial affairs office,” – all unfortunate situations that can have an impact on a student’s academic future.

A large presence of fraternities and sororities can also correlate with heavy drinking on campuses. Numerous studies have found that students involved in “Greek Life” use more alcohol than their peers. Well-publicized cases of tragedies put a spotlight on this. The tragic death of a 19-year old Penn State student in 2017 after drinking heavily and falling down a flight of stairs at a fraternity house may be a case where prompt medical attention might have saved his life. Instead the call was not made for 12 hours. Eighteen men faced charges of involuntary manslaughter, felony aggravated assault and tampering with evidence.

All but 13 states have some sort of Medical Amnesty law which grants some legal immunity to minors who seek medical attention for themselves or someone else who has been drinking. Every student should know about this possibly life-saving law. <https://www.medicalamnesty.org/>

This highlights the need for parents and other adults to talk to kids honestly about alcohol, to tell them about the signs of dangerous levels of intoxication and how to help, and make sure they are aware of medical amnesty laws.

Colleges are trying different ways to help students avoid harm from alcohol overuse. Some organize evening events to redirect the focus from alcohol, some have ride services to get students home after a night out. For example, Associated Students of Colorado State University offers RamRide, “a free, safe, non-judgmental ride home”. Students use an app to call student volunteers for a ride home in a minivan. This group also helps sponsor a city bus line that runs on weekend nights, looping between the area of town where there are many bars through the areas where many students live. Some colleges are making an effort to save the investment that students and their families make in sending a kid to college.

Given the amount of harm and the huge investment that college requires, it's time for a “full-court press”! In 2003, the National Institute of Medicine, National Research Council called for a “Collective Responsibility” to reduce underage drinking. They specified a roll for all segments of society from the individual to the parents to law enforcement, education and public health. This approach took time, but now underage drinking rates are at historic lows. Let's do the same for college drinking!

Sources:

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