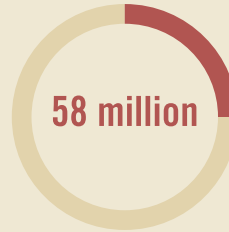


# Prevention of Alcohol Abuse in the U.S.

Alcohol abuse is a widespread issue in the United States. Even though it's legal for individuals over age 21 to purchase and drink alcohol, many consume alcohol at levels that pose safety and health risks for themselves and others. Excessive alcohol use can cause serious problems and, for some, may lead to dependence. Alcohol abuse can affect people of all ages, and problems associated with alcohol dependence take a toll on the individual who drinks, as well as their families, children, workplace, and communities.

17 million

Almost 17 million people aged 12 or older (23 percent) are classified with alcohol dependence.<sup>1</sup>



Nearly one quarter (23 percent) of individuals aged 12 or older — over 58 million people — participated in binge drinking at least once in the last 30 days.<sup>2</sup>

80,000 deaths  
PER YEAR

Excessive alcohol consumption is associated with approximately 80,000 deaths per year.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) defines "binge drinking" as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.

## Alcohol abuse affects individuals, families, and communities.

### Alcohol abuse can lead to risky and dangerous behavior.

- Almost 29 million people report that they drove under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year. Men were almost twice as likely as women to drive under the influence (15 vs. 8 percent). The drunk driving rate was highest among people aged 21 to 25 (22 percent) but 13.5 percent of 18 to 20 year olds took this risk too.<sup>4</sup> Alcohol is a factor in almost one third (31 percent) of fatal motor vehicle crashes.<sup>5</sup>
- People who drink heavily (e.g., binge drinking on at least 5 days in the past 30 days) are more likely to use illicit drugs. Among the 16 million heavy drinkers in the U.S., almost one third (31 percent) are current illicit drug users.<sup>6</sup>
- More than half (55 percent) of heavy alcohol users aged 12 or older smoke cigarettes, compared to only 18 percent of current drinkers who smoke but don't binge drink. Smokeless tobacco use and cigar

use also were more prevalent among heavy drinkers (11.7 and 15.2 percent, respectively).<sup>7</sup>

### Parents and adults who abuse alcohol expose their families to negative consequences.

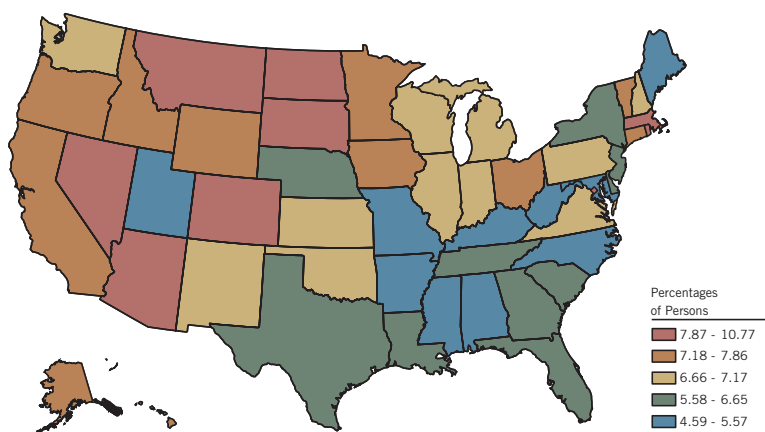
- When parents drink to excess, their children are more likely to use alcohol excessively as they grow up.<sup>8</sup>
- A recent study has shown that 16 and 17 year olds living with parents who drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs are more likely to drive under the influence than adolescents whose parents do not drive under the influence.<sup>9</sup>
- A parent's abuse of alcohol can lead to child abuse, neglect, injuries, and deaths due to motor vehicle accidents.<sup>10</sup>

## For anyone who drinks alcohol in excess, there are severe health consequences.

- Alcohol abuse can lead to dependency, also known as alcoholism. Signs of alcoholism include a tolerance to alcohol or withdrawal symptoms, which include anxiety, shakiness, sweating, nausea, insomnia, depression, irritability, fatigue, or a headache if alcohol isn't used.<sup>11</sup>
- Excessive drinking is known to cause serious liver damage and also to affect the nervous system, muscles, lungs, pancreas, and heart.<sup>12,13</sup>
- Excessive alcohol use is linked directly to increased burden from diabetes, cardiovascular problems, and chronic disease.<sup>14</sup>

## Alcohol Dependence or Abuse in the Past Year Among People Aged 12 or Older, by State:

Percentages, Annual Averages Based on 2010 and 2011 NSDUHs



Source: SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, NSDUH, 2010 (Revised March 2012) and 2011. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/NSDUH/2k11State/NSDUHsaeMaps2011.htm>

## A National Perspective

Excessive alcohol use can occur in any community, and some places in the U.S. face higher rates of alcohol dependence or abuse than others. See below for steps communities can take to reduce the prevalence of alcohol abuse.

## What Communities Can Do

### Family Members and Friends

Recognize the warning signs. Family and friends can help to prevent alcohol abuse by knowing and recognizing the warning signs. Signs to look for include:<sup>15</sup>

- Repeated alcohol use resulting in neglect of responsibilities at home, work, or school;
- Using alcohol in situations where it's physically dangerous;
- Experiencing repeated legal problems on account of drinking;
- Continuing to drink even though alcohol is causing social or interpersonal problems; and
- Drinking as a way to relax or de-stress.

### Educators

Create a positive learning environment and inform college students about the risks of alcohol abuse. Educators and school administrators can influence young people to change their attitudes about alcohol abuse and binge drinking.<sup>16</sup>

### Community Leaders and Organizations

- Communities can implement prevention strategies that focus on changing the environmental conditions that foster problematic alcohol use. This includes policies that control access and availability, media messages, and enforcement actions.<sup>17</sup>

- Working with policymakers, community members can work to regulate the number of alcohol retailers in the community as a whole and in specific neighborhoods, and also restrict sales. Both strategies can help reduce alcohol availability, decrease crime rates, and improve the community.<sup>18</sup>
- Learn more about national efforts in the **National Prevention Strategy**, available at <http://www.healthcare.gov/prevention/nphpphc/strategy/report.pdf>.

### Workplaces<sup>19</sup>

Workplace programs can help employers create cost-effective, safe, and healthy workplaces. Workplace programs that focus on preventing alcohol and drug problems generally have at least five key components:

- A written policy;
- Employee education;
- Supervisor training;
- An employee assistance program (EAP); and
- Drug testing.

Before considering these five components, employers should examine the needs of their organizations and take steps to ensure that the programs they design will work well in their workplaces. Download SAMHSA's **Drug-Free Workplace Kit** from <http://www.drugfreeworkplace.gov/pdf/workplace-kit.pdf> for more information about implementing programs to prevent problem alcohol use and drug use among employees.

### Everyone

- Join a community coalition or volunteer with a local organization that's working to prevent alcohol abuse and underage drinking.
- Become media-literate to learn that not all media messages (e.g., television ads, portrayals of alcohol use on TV and in the movies) are what they seem. Call attention to depictions of alcohol use that can be misleading because of the presenter's point of view.<sup>20</sup>
- Support and encourage others to get professional help if they have alcohol problems. To find a substance abuse treatment program, go to <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/> or call 1-800-662-HELP (4537) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD).

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## Helpful Resources

- **The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)**, at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>, provides leadership in the national effort to reduce alcohol-related problems.
- **The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Center for Excellence**, at <http://www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov>, is a SAMHSA-led initiative devoted to preventing and treating Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). It provides information and resources about FASD and materials to help raise awareness.
- **The Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies**, at <http://captus.samhsa.gov>, is a SAMHSA initiative that works to develop and improve the skills, knowledge, and expertise of the prevention workforce.
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** provides support for people with alcohol problems. More information and a list of support groups are available at <http://www.aa.org>.

- **Al-Anon/Alateen Family Groups**, at <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org>, is a support group for families and friends of people with alcohol problems.
- **The National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcohol Prevention Task Force on College Drinking**, at <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov> or by calling 301-443-3860, is a site that offers research and information on college drinking.

**If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be abusing alcohol, help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year through SAMHSA's National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357), or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD). The Helpline provides free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish.**

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