



Binge Drinking: Impact on Youth and Young Adults

While overall underage drinking rates appear to be on the decline, binge drinking is on the rise for youth and young adults.



What is Binge Drinking?

Binge drinking is defined as consuming an excessive amount of drinks within a few hours of each other. **For men, that is five or more drinks, and for women, it is four or more drinks** – assuming a standard serving size of alcohol—a 12 oz can of beer, a 5 oz glass of wine, a 1.5 oz of spirits or an 8 - 10 oz hard seltzer.

In 2023, roughly 13.1 million people ages 12 to 25 reported binge drinking in the month before being surveyed, with youths aged 12-17 accounting for 3.3 million – increasing from only 834,000 in 2022.

Alcohol in Social Media

Social media has a powerful impact on youth and young adults, shaping behaviors, perceptions and trends. Individuals share posts with images of themselves drinking alcohol at events and socially. These posts depict alcohol consumption as a regular—even fun—part of life.

Posts from individuals, such as family, friends or even influencers, typically lack disclaimers or warnings about the potential dangers associated with alcohol consumption. The lack of warning combined with the positive portrayal of alcohol can contribute to underage drinking, as young social media users may not fully understand the risks associated with alcohol consumption and often try to mimic lifestyles depicted online.

What are the Impacts of Binge Drinking?

Because binge drinking increases the amount of alcohol in the system at a rapid rate, individuals can experience loss of coordination and balance, slurred speech, slowed reactions, impaired judgment and even medical issues, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, dizziness, nausea or blurred vision.

But the impact goes beyond that. Binge drinking often results in:

- Injuries from motor vehicle crashes, falls, drownings and burns
- Violence, including physical altercations, sexual assault, suicide and homicide
- Alcohol poisoning, a medical emergency resulting from high blood alcohol levels that could lead to death
- Risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex and sex with multiple partners, which can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases

The more binge drinking a person participates in, the higher the risk of developing physical and mental health issues, including chronic diseases, such as liver disease, digestive problems and heart disease, social problems and increased risk of anxiety and depression. Drinking alcohol has also been linked to increased risk of mouth, breast, colorectal and other cancers.

If you or someone you know has a medical emergency, call 911. If the emergency is related to underage drinking, it is still vital that you call 911. New Jersey's Good Samaritan Law (N.J.S.A. 2C:33-15) encourages anyone to call for medical help in alcohol-related emergencies without fear of prosecution.

If you are 18+ years old and would like support in reducing your alcohol use, contact IFPR's Peer Recovery Program at **848-303-0008** to speak with a certified recovery specialist. Recovery specialists can help you build healthier coping skills, reduce your use of substances and cultivate a supportive community. You can also visit rwjbh.org/preventionandrecovery to learn more about the RWJBarnabas Health Institute for Prevention and Recovery.

Additionally, RWJBarnabas Health offers Addiction and Abuse Services, visit rwjbh.org/treatment-care/alcohol-and-drug-dependency to learn more.



Signs of Underage Drinking or Alcohol Use Disorder

Warning signs for underage or problematic drinking can mimic other behaviors, especially in teens. It's important to note if these behaviors are out of the ordinary for the individual or if there is a sudden change to their usual behavior. Signs may include:

- Mood and personality changes
- Depression
- Hyperactivity
- Disengagement from school, poor school attendance or dropping out
- Health and hygiene issues
- Changes in relationships with friends and family
- Unhealthy peer and dating relationships
- Problems with police

Strategies to Change Alcohol & Binge Drinking Culture

Discourage and delay drinking at a young age – The legal drinking age is 21, and an individual's brain doesn't fully develop until the age of 25. The longer you wait to start drinking alcohol, the lower your chance of developing and experiencing problems.

Watch what you say – Phrases that casually reference alcohol as a coping mechanism or necessity – such as “I just need a drink,” “It’s 5 o’clock somewhere,” “Let’s drink to that” and “Just one more won’t hurt” – can reinforce unhealthy drinking habits and normalize reliance on alcohol in everyday life. Over time, they can shape attitudes toward drinking.

Take the focus off of alcohol – Minimize consuming alcohol at weddings, sporting events, graduation celebrations, college parties, homecoming and even 21st birthdays. Don’t encourage “chugging” or playing drinking games. Find ways to celebrate and have fun without focusing on alcohol!

Offer non-alcoholic beverages or “mocktails”—Mocktails are a fun and refreshing way to enjoy a delicious drink without the alcohol. Bursting with fresh flavors, these drinks are easy to make and allow you to enjoy the social aspect of a drink in hand. Whether it’s a dinner party, birthday celebration or relaxing evening, mocktails offer all the fun without the alcohol.



Scan and click the QR code to learn more about the benefits of switching to mocktails and find recipes.

If you are planning on drinking alcohol, think ahead:

- Get a ride home. Call a rideshare, a friend or a family member to pick you up.
- Agree on a trusted designated driver ahead of time. If you are in a group, agree on one individual who will not drink or use drugs.
- Be aware of the effects of over-the-counter and prescription medications. Many over-the-counter medications can impact your ability to drive safely, whether on their own or mixed with alcohol.

Sources:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32038379/>

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-effects-health/alcohol-topics-z/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/alcohol-use-united-states-age-groups-and-demographic-characteristics>

<https://niaaaforteens.niaaa.nih.gov/>

**RWJBarnabas
HEALTH**

**Institute for
Prevention
and Recovery**