

Dangers Of Underaged Binge Drinking & The Value Of Early Discussions About Alcohol

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Binge drinking, which is loosely defined as the consumption of 4-5 or more standard drinks per session, is a common risk behavior among adolescent populations, spanning from high school to college students. Compared to adult drinkers, underaged drinkers drink higher volumes of alcohol per session (Chung T et al., 2018). Although the prevalence of binge drinking among adolescents has been on the decline, adolescents remain the largest group to participate in binge drinking, making it a pressing area of concern (Chung T et al.).

The consequences of underaged binge drinking are diverse and detrimental. Adolescence is an important and sensitive period of physical, mental, and social development, and binge drinking threatens all elements of healthy growth. For example, underaged binge drinking can impair neurological growth, which can impede performance in school, social function, and success later in life. Beyond mental development, underaged binge drinking can disrupt growth and other areas of physical development. Underaged drinking can also facilitate poor decision making: driving drunk or entering a vehicle with a drunk driver; unsafe sexual activity and sexual violence; and experimenting with other substances are a few examples of risk behaviors promoted by binge drinking (CDC, 2022).

According to the 2021 CMHS Wellness survey, 22% of students at CMS reported having discussions about underaged drinking with their parents/guardian, while 42% of students at CHS reported having discussions about underaged drinking with their parents/guardian. Compared to high school students, noticeably fewer middle school parents are talking with their children about underaged drinking. Although underaged drinking is more prevalent among high school students, earlier discussions starting in middle school are shown to decrease the prevalence of underaged binge drinking and postpone experimentation with alcohol. Discussing expectations about alcohol and the dangers of binge drinking at an earlier age will also foster healthy drinking habits, making transparency surrounding underaged drinking an imperative for the future.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/questionnaires.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>

Chung T, Creswell KG, Bachrach R, Clark DB, Martin CS. Adolescent Binge Drinking. *Alcohol Res.* 2018;39(1):5-15. PMID: 30557142; PMCID: PMC6104966.