



# Alcohol

You probably see and hear a lot about alcohol - from TV, movies, music, social media, and your friends. But what are the real facts? Although media images may try to convince us that "everyone" is drinking, most young people don't drink alcohol. Research shows that almost 80% of 12 to 20-year-olds haven't had a drink in the past month. Additionally, the continuing decline of underage alcohol use is confirmed by multiple surveys across all regions of Florida over the past decade. (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey). But even with this healthy trend, alcohol continues to be the most frequently observed substance in drug-related deaths in Florida.

## WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

Alcohol is a drug. It's classed as a depressant derived from the fermentation of natural sugars in fruits, vegetables and grains. It's brewed and distilled into a wide range of beverages with various alcohol contents. But whether it is a 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a shot of liquor (1.5 ounces), they all have the same amount of alcohol and the same effects on the body.

## WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT IT? THE FACTS ARE...

### How It Effects the Body

Although classified as a depressant, when first consumed and absorbed into the bloodstream, some may feel alcohol has a stimulant effect. But it actually slows down the body's vital functions and the brain's nerve cells, resulting in slurred speech, unsteady movement, distorted thoughts, disturbed perceptions and an inability to react quickly.

Alcohol is metabolized or eliminated by the liver. But the liver can only metabolize a certain amount at a time, leaving the excess circulating throughout the body. When the amount of alcohol in the blood exceeds a certain level through binge drinking (consuming 4-5 drinks at one time), the respiratory (breathing) system slows down greatly, and can result in alcohol poisoning, vomiting, coma, or death because oxygen can no longer reach the brain.

*Underage alcohol use continues to decline in Florida.*

### Short-Term Effects

On average, it takes 2 to 3 hours for a single drink to make it through your body. There's nothing that will make that happen quicker. Once in your body, alcohol travels through your bloodstream and can damage your brain, stomach, liver, kidneys and muscles. Emotionally and behaviorally it reduces your inhibitions (the ability to stop yourself from doing something you know you shouldn't), coordination and reaction time – all of which put you at risk of having accidents and getting injured. Each year, approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking. This includes about 1,900 deaths from car accidents, 1,600 homicides, 300 suicides, and hundreds of other deaths due to accidents like falls, burns and drownings.

*Binge drinking can result in alcohol poisoning, vomiting, coma, or death.*

## Long-Term Effects

Our brain goes through significant development during the teen and young adult years and doesn't stop growing until about age 25. When you're young, drinking alcohol can make learning new things more difficult and alter the brain. Like all drugs, alcohol is addictive and people who begin drinking before they turn 15 are more likely to develop a drinking problem at some point in their lives than those who begin drinking at age 21 or older, when it is legal to drink.

Drinking increases your risk for many diseases, such as cancer and statistics show that more teens are killed by alcohol than by all illegal drugs combined.

## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

### Students

To prevent the potential problems caused by underage alcohol use, know how you will turn down an offer before it comes. Create a one-liner you feel comfortable saying to a friend, such as "no thanks, not my thing." You can also suggest an alternate healthy activity or leave the area.

If you're drinking alcohol - stop. The longer you ignore the facts and its effects, the more chances you take with your health and well-being. Find a healthy replacement behavior and how to live above the influence of negative ones at [abovetheinfluence.com](http://abovetheinfluence.com).

Although initially using alcohol may seem to make a problem smaller, it only postpones the problem and creates many more. If you need help in stopping, talk to your parents, a doctor, a counselor, a teacher, or another adult you trust. You can also call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This helpline can also be used to assist a friend seeking professional help. To learn more about underage drinking, go to [stopalcoholabuse.gov](http://stopalcoholabuse.gov) and [toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov](http://toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov).

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### Parents

Stay informed, know the risks, and don't minimize the potential damage caused by use. Although most teens aren't drinking alcohol, know the signs of use to keep your children safe. You are the most important influence in your child's life, so never provide them alcohol.

To find more information, go to The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids at [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org) or call their Parents Toll-Free Helpline 1-855-DRUGFREE. Additional resources can be found at the National Family Partnership ([nfp.org](http://nfp.org)), or the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH)'s site just for parents ([drugabuse.gov](http://drugabuse.gov)), or the United Way of Broward County Commission on Behavioral Health and Drug Prevention's Underage Drinking Toolkit ([drugfreebroward.org](http://drugfreebroward.org)).

For a local professional who specializes in addiction, dial 211 to reach Broward's 211 First Call for Help information and referral hotline.

### Teachers

Help your students learn healthy ways to cope with difficult feelings other than turning to drugs. Use Broward County's Above the Influence Toolkit ([browardschools.com/ati](http://browardschools.com/ati)) or go to the national Above the Influence website ([abovetheinfluence.com](http://abovetheinfluence.com)).

Additional curriculum and resources can be found in the School Climate & Discipline Resources SharePoint or at [HealthTeacher.com](http://HealthTeacher.com).

**For more information, links and resources go to [BrowardPrevention.org](http://BrowardPrevention.org).**

*Sources: National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Above the Influence [abovetheinfluence.com](http://abovetheinfluence.com). SAMHSA Tips for Teens, <http://store.samhsa.gov>. [Drugfreeworld.org](http://Drugfreeworld.org) Truth About Alcohol.*