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For Immediate Release

National Alcohol Awareness Month

Underage Binge Drinking on the Rise

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Very soon thousands of Illinois teenagers will walk across the stage to receive their high school diplomas. Families will congregate to celebrate these achievements. It is an exciting time full of gatherings and parties. Unfortunately, with celebrations often comes opportunities for underage drinking.

April is designated “National Alcohol Awareness Month,” a time to increase public awareness and understanding, reduce stigma and encourage local communities to focus on alcohol and alcohol-related issues and consequences. This April the important public health issue of **underage drinking**, a problem with devastating individual, family and community consequences, is being highlighted.

According to the *Illinois Youth Survey (IYS), alcohol is the drug of choice among Illinois youth and is the most commonly reported drug used across all age groups. As youth age, alcohol use increases. While about one out of three 8th graders report using alcohol in the past year, by the time they reach 12th grade, about two out of three report use in the past year. The IYS also found that binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks in a row during the past two weeks) is on the rise among 12th graders. In 2012, 30.5% of high schools seniors reported binge drinking compared to 23.4% in 2010.

“Underage alcohol use is not confined to one geographic or demographic area,” noted Karel Homrig, Executive Director of Prevention First. “So often underage drinking is overlooked and considered a rite of passage among teens. Another misconception is that adolescents can easily recover from alcohol use because their bodies are more resilient. However, the exact opposite is true.”

During adolescence the brain goes through rapid development and wiring changes. The brain’s frontal lobes, essential for functions such as emotional regulation, planning and organization, continue to develop through adolescence and young adulthood (American Academy of Pediatrics). Adolescent alcohol use can damage this wiring, which is essential to becoming a mature and thoughtful adult. The adolescent brain is more vulnerable to the toxic and addictive actions of alcohol. Adolescents need only drink half as much as adults to suffer negative effects. Alcohol use can impair parts of the brain that control memory, judgment and decision making, impulse control and motor control.

There are many negative consequences to teenage alcohol use including:

- Adolescent drinkers perform poorly in school, are more likely to fall behind and have an increased risk of health and social problems, depression, suicidal thoughts and violence than their non-drinking peers.
- Adolescent drinkers scored worse than non-users on vocabulary, general information, memory and memory retrieval.
- Verbal and non-verbal information recall was most heavily affected, with a 10 percent performance decrease in alcohol users.

Prevention First is Illinois’ ONLY nonprofit resource center specializing in preventing alcohol and other drug use among youth and pregnant women.



- Alcohol affects the sleep cycle, resulting in impaired learning and memory as well as disrupted release of hormones necessary for growth and maturation.
- Youth who begin drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol problems or addiction than those who start after age 21.

Families and schools can become involved in spreading awareness and the importance of preventing underage drinking in a number of ways. The Prevention First [Virtual Clearinghouse](https://www.prevention.org/Resources/VirtualClearinghouse.aspx) (<https://www.prevention.org/Resources/VirtualClearinghouse.aspx>) provides a great number of resources that can be used by parents, schools, and teens. Topics include “Parents/Caregivers Help” and “Underage Substance Abuse/Drinking.” Each topic includes access to fact sheets, kits, and other documents and resources that individuals will find useful as they work to keep their children safe.

It is important for parents to remember that the most important tool they have is their voice. According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, kids who learn about the risks of alcohol and drugs from their parents are significantly less likely to use drugs, yet 20 percent report not getting that benefit.

Schools are encouraged to start a Students Against Destructive Decisions ([SADD](#)) chapter. SADD is a peer-to-peer education, prevention and activism organization dedicated to preventing destructive decisions. Their mission is to provide students with the best prevention tools possible to deal with the issues of underage drinking, other drug use, risky and impaired driving, and other destructive decisions.

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*According to the [2012 Illinois Youth Survey](#) - the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has funded the administration of the Illinois Youth Survey (IYS) biennially since 1990. The IYS is a self-report survey administered in school settings and is designed to gather information about a variety of health and social indicators including substance use patterns and attitudes of Illinois youth.

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