

April is Alcohol Awareness Month!

“Alcohol use during adolescence is pervasive, and science makes clear the effects on young people can be profound.”

-Steven K. Galson, MD, Former U.S. Surgeon General, 2008



Underage drinking is no big deal, right?

Wrong. The bodies and brains of youth are still developing until their early- to mid-20s and alcohol can stunt the brain's development. Scientific evidence finds that excess alcohol, and binge drinking (5 or more alcoholic drinks at one time for males, 4 for females) in particular, damage parts of the brain and are associated with impaired decision making.

More Facts About Underage Drinking

- Youth who start drinking before age 15 are 5 times more likely to develop an alcohol abuse problem than those who wait until 21. Youth who start drinking before 21 and have a family history of alcohol abuse or alcoholism are at an even greater risk for addiction.
- Underage drinking is linked to risky behaviors including violence, sexual assault, homicide, suicide, unprotected sex, smoking, and accidental injury.
- Every day 8,000 teens under the age of 16 take their first drink.
- Alcohol kills more teens than all other drugs combined. Each year, 6,000 teens die from alcohol-related causes.
- Binge drinking is a common drinking pattern among teens, and most teens who drink consume more alcohol per episode than adults 21 or older.

What about Our Kids?

The 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed that among High School students in Mecklenburg County:

- **33%** had at least one drink on one or more days in the past 30 days
- **14%** had 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row on one or more days in the past 30 days (binge drinking).

The 2008 Youth Drug Survey showed that among Mecklenburg County youth who drink:

- the average age of first use of alcohol was **12.7 years**.
- the average age of first binge drinking was **14.7 years**.



Can parents and other adults help prevent underage drinking?

Yes! It's never too early, or too late, to start talking with your kids about abstaining from alcohol until they're 21. Studies show that it can take parents up to two years to become aware of the alcohol consumption patterns of their children. Yet parents are the most influential people in the life of their child, and children want clear instruction from parents about alcohol use.

- Be a good example. Show your kids that everyone can have fun at holidays, parties and other events without always having to have alcohol.
- Take away temptation. Lock up your alcohol, take an inventory of how much you have and check to make sure it's not diluted. It is a free and easy precaution with huge benefits.
- Providing a party with alcohol for youth under 21 and taking the car keys away will not prevent addiction. Taking away the car keys will not prevent physical and sexual abuse and will not prevent the brain from stunting its growth.
- Know the consequences. It's never a good idea to serve alcohol to youth. It's illegal and can result in criminal penalties including fines and the loss of your driver's license.

Where can I get more information?

There are many local and national resources that are dedicated to preventing underage drinking and substance abuse.

- Charlotte Mecklenburg Drug Free Coalition: Prevent Underage Drinking Initiative, 704 375-3784 (Ext. 24), www.drugfreecharlotte.org
- Anuvia Prevention and Recovery Center, 704 376-7447, www.anuvia.org
- Substance Abuse Prevention Services, 704-375-DRUG, www.preventionservices.org
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, www.samhsa.gov
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, www.niaaa.nih.gov
- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, www.cadca.org
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving, www.madd.org