

ALCOHOL POISONING AND ALCOHOL USE DISORDER

The holiday season is upon us and people will be gathering to celebrate. The Michigan Poison and Drug Information Center (MiPDC) hopes everyone enjoys this holiday season. Taking steps to reduce the risks associated with alcohol use and unexpected exposure to alcohols keeps your holidays safe and healthy.

Many will indulge in alcoholic beverages during the holiday season. Those who overconsume alcohol can experience negative health effects and consequences. Injuries from falls and vehicle accidents are common results of alcohol use and abuse. Individuals may underestimate the time it takes for alcohol's effects to occur. This can lead to greater alcohol consumption and prolonged adverse symptoms related to use.¹

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AND EFFECTS

Alcohol depresses the central nervous system. The intensity of the effects is directly related to the amount of alcohol consumed. The amount of alcohol in an alcoholic beverage is not determined by the amount of liquid. Alcohol content is measured by percentages. For instance, a 12-ounce beer may contain 5% alcohol and a typical 5-ounce glass of wine usually contains 12% alcohol. A 1.5-ounce shot of 80-proof liquor contains 40% alcohol. Mixing alcohol with other beverages does not decrease the amount of alcohol consumed. It may only decrease the discomfort associated with consuming alcoholic beverages with higher alcohol content and the time taken to consume the beverage. This can be deceiving and lead to lapses in judgment resulting in greater overall alcohol consumption.² To learn about the alcohol content of standard drinks, click [here](#) for more from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

People who should not consume alcohol include:

- Any person under 21 years of age
- Anyone who may be pregnant
- Anyone who plans to operate a vehicle
- Anyone who is in recovery from alcoholism
- Anyone who has been told to abstain from alcohol for medical reasons, including use of certain medications

Anyone taking prescription or over-the-counter medication for any reason should check with their healthcare provider before planning to consume alcoholic beverages.

Small children who consume alcoholic beverages are at a much greater risk for poisoning than adults. A two-year-old child who unintentionally consumes alcohol can experience significant central nervous system depression and low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). Children may also experience respiratory depression, seizures, coma and even death following alcohol consumption.

Alcohol is the most widely abused recreational substance among youth under the age of 21 years. Underage consumption of alcohol results in more than 189,000 emergency room visits and 3,500 deaths in persons under 21 years of age each year in the United States. Teens and young adults under 21 years of age are more likely to binge drink or consume four or more alcoholic beverages in a short period of time. Binge drinking is directly related to the high rate of alcohol poisoning among youth who consume alcohol.³ Alcohol use in this demographic is associated with cognitive impairment, academic difficulties, and increased risk of alcohol use disorder (AUD) in youth and into adulthood.⁴ Like adults, youth should seek

¹ (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2020)

² (National Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC, 2021)

³ (Division of Population Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC, 2020)

⁴ (SAMSHA Report to Congress)

early help and treatment for alcohol dependence. Click [here](#) for the NIAAA Alcohol Treatment Navigator for help near you. Early intervention is key to preventing immediate and long-term effects of alcohol use and abuse.

ALCOHOL POISONING

Alcohol poisoning is the immediate result of excessive alcohol consumption over a short period of time. It is estimated that six people die each day from alcohol poisoning in the United States (US). Excessive consumption of alcohol decreases brain function and can impact critical functions like breathing, heart rate, and body temperature control. Other signs of alcohol poisoning include vomiting, seizures, and inability to wake.⁵ Anyone experiencing these symptoms should seek care in an emergency room immediately or call 911 for help.

ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE - LONG TERM RISKS

Alcohol use disorder can lead to the development of chronic and irreversible health problems. People who struggle with AUD can be at greater risk during the holiday season. People with AUD have developed the following serious health issues:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease and stroke
- Liver disease and digestive problems
- Cancer
- Immune deficiency
- Cognitive impairment
- Dementia
- Mental health and social problems⁶

Additionally, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommends continued precautions to reduce the risks of contracting and spreading the coronavirus during your gatherings. Although washing hands often and properly is preferred, hand sanitizer is an acceptable alternative when soap and water are unavailable at your celebrations.⁷ Effective alcohol-based hand sanitizers should contain at least 60% ethanol or isopropyl alcohol. The US Food and Drug Administration continues to inform the public about recalled hand sanitizers containing substances that may be highly toxic, ineffective, or contaminated. Children and adults who drink hand sanitizer may develop symptoms requiring treatment in an emergency room. Click [here](#) for updates from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or visit [FDA.gov](#) and search “Hand Sanitizer Recalls”. Keep hand sanitizers out of reach of children and others who do not understand use of these products. Supervised use is always recommended.

The MiPDC hopes everyone safely enjoys the holiday season with loved ones. If you drink, please be responsible and know your limit. If you have questions or need more information about the effects of alcohol, call us day or night.

Michigan Poison & Drug Information Center

1-800-222-1222

Free, confidential, expert advice

Available 24/7

⁵ (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015)

⁶ (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

⁷ (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)



References

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015, January). Alcohol Poisoning Deaths-CDC Vital Signs. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/alcohol-poisoning-deaths/index.html>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, May 11). Alcohol Use and Your Health. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, August 13). COVID-19. *How to Protect Yourself & Others*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
- National Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC. (2021, February 16). *About Alcohol FAQ's*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm>
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2020, December). The Truth About Holiday Spirits. Retrieved from <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/truth-about-holiday-spirits>
- SAMSHA Report to Congress. (n.d.). Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking 2020. Retrieved from https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/media/ReportToCongress/2020/report_main/2020_Report_to_Congress.pdf