

# Availability and Favorable Attitudes Toward Drinking Create the Perfect Storm for Youth Alcohol Use.

While you may be protecting your kids from sunburn and the Montana elements, are you also protecting them from a hangover?

**Kids will sample alcohol for the first time in July** more than any other month, according to SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health. The same study also reports that nationally 10 percent of children age 12, and 50 percent of children age 15, already have consumed alcohol. Montana students report 24% have drunk alcohol, other than just a few sips, for the first time before the age of 13. (2009 YRBS).

In Montana, by the time teenagers graduate from high school, 85 percent will have had their first drink. Forty five percent of those high school students also admit to "binge drinking." These data point from the 2009 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), <http://www.opi.mt.gov/YRBS/index.html>

With a wealth of new evidence about how alcohol affects teen brains differently than those of adults, underage drinking can no longer be viewed as a "rite of passage." Underage drinking is more dangerous than adult alcohol consumption because the brain continues to develop through the early twenties. Alcohol consumption before that age has been shown to damage areas of the brain responsible for good judgment, planning, decision making and impulse control. Alcohol can also damage verbal recall and memory functions when consumed by youth.

Keeping kids motivated and challenged during the summer—through sports, hobbies, music or travel—is one of the best things adults can do to keep them away from alcohol. We also can help kids develop healthy attitudes about alcohol by:

- not over-consuming alcohol in front of them.
- not asking them to serve us or bartend at BBQs.
- not lying or pretending that we've never been drunk. Instead, tell them how you monitor yourself to drink responsibly and what to do if someone else hasn't.
- being aware of the facts about how alcohol affects children differently than adults and sharing these facts with kids you know.
- not hosting drinking parties or buying alcohol for kids.

Start talking to the children in your life now about the importance of avoiding alcohol and drugs. And don't think that you don't need to act just because you're not the parent. Older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, coaches and camp counselors often are powerful and memorable influences. In fact, youth may be more willing to listen to what you say if you're not their parent.

Kids who begin drinking before age 15 are 40 percent more likely to become adult alcoholics compared to those who wait until their 21st birthday. So, learn the facts, learn the warning signs and teach kids to wait to drink. They'll be healthier for it.

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