

**THE SURGEON GENERAL'S CALL TO ACTION**

# **TO PREVENT AND REDUCE UNDERAGE DRINKING**

**What It Means to YOU**

***A Guide to Action  
for Educators***



# ABOUT THIS SURGEON GENERAL'S CALL TO ACTION

The Surgeon General, the Nation's top public health officer, is appointed by the President of the United States to help protect and promote the health of the Nation.

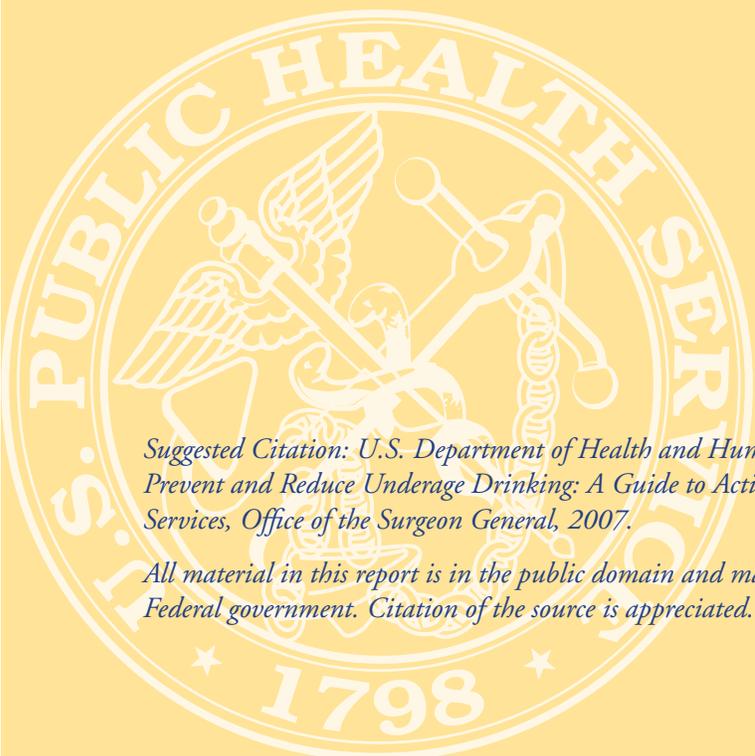
The Surgeon General, a physician, provides the American people with the latest scientific information on how to improve their health and to reduce their risk for illness or injury.

When a health topic warrants special attention, the Surgeon General may issue a national call to action. The recently published *Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* highlights underage alcohol use as a major public health and safety issue.

## About This Guide to Action for Educators

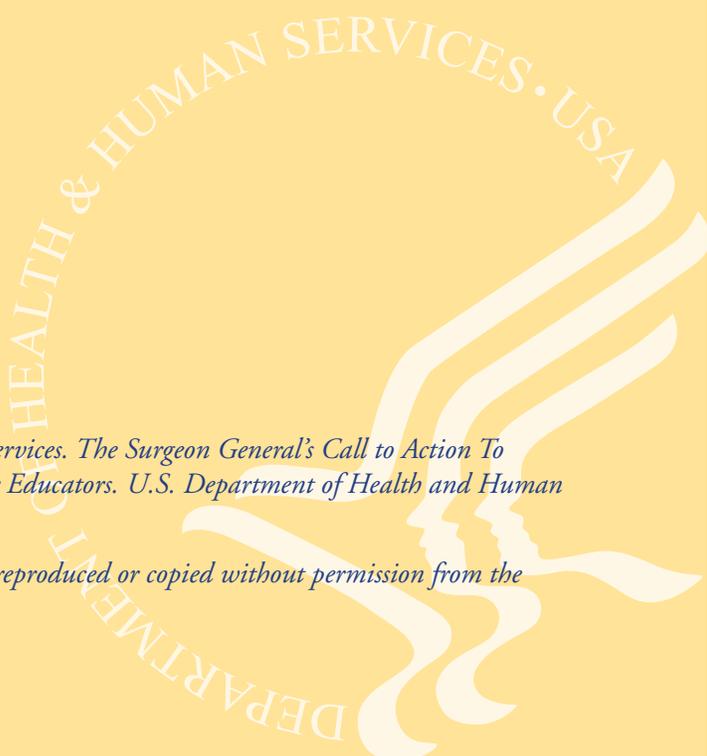
This Guide to Action for Educators highlights key issues related to underage drinking found in the complete *Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking*. It was developed to provide educators and other school personnel a guide to what they can do to take action against underage drinking and why.

The Surgeon General believes that, when armed with the knowledge and tools they need to help tackle a significant public health problem, parents, educators, administrators, and policymakers are better able to take action to prevent and reduce the problem and the suffering it causes.



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# TODAY, NEARLY 10.8 MILLION YOUTH, AGES 12-20, ARE UNDERAGE DRINKERS

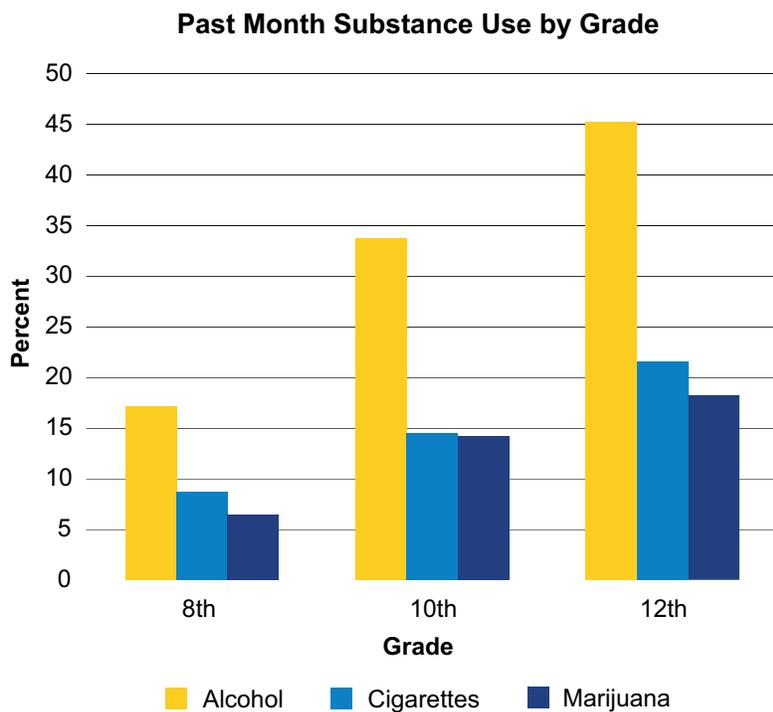
The goal of healthy growth and development for America's youth—a goal shared by parents and teachers, health care providers, and health care policymakers—is threatened by underage drinking.

## What Is Underage Drinking?

Simply put, underage drinking is the use of alcohol by a person under the age of 21, the minimum legal drinking age. With few exceptions, such as the use of alcohol as part of a religious ceremony, underage drinking is against the law. Underage drinking is also dangerous; it can have a negative effect on the mind and body of an adolescent in ways many people don't realize.

Yet, underage drinking persists and today, is a serious problem deeply embedded in American culture. It is time to change that. Tacit acceptance of underage drinking as a rite of passage must become unacceptable. It will take repeated work over time in homes and schools, on campuses, and in policy arenas. Prevention of underage drinking must become a priority—an ongoing project for parents, teachers, and other concerned adults—that begins before puberty and continues throughout adolescence.

**Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth.** A higher percentage of young people use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs.



**More adolescents drink than smoke or use drugs.**

—Johnston, et al. 2006 *Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use*.

# THE FACTS

- ◆ As they grow older, the chance that young people will use alcohol grows. Approximately 10% of 12-year-olds say they have used alcohol at least once. By age 13 that number doubles. And by age 15, approximately 50% have had at least one drink.
- ◆ Young adults, ages 18-20, have the highest rate of alcohol dependence in the U.S. population, and they are not legally old enough to drink.

## Did You Know?

- ◆ The start of alcohol use in adolescence is influenced more by an adolescent's environment than by his or her genetics.
- ◆ Alcohol use by children and adolescents is frequently made possible by adults. Minors cannot legally obtain alcohol except in special circumstances.

## FAST FACT

Most 6-year-olds know that alcohol is only for adults. However, between the ages of 9 and 13, youth begin to think more positively about alcohol use. That's why it's never too early to start the dialogue about the dangers of underage drinking.

# WHAT IS “A DRINK,” ANYWAY?

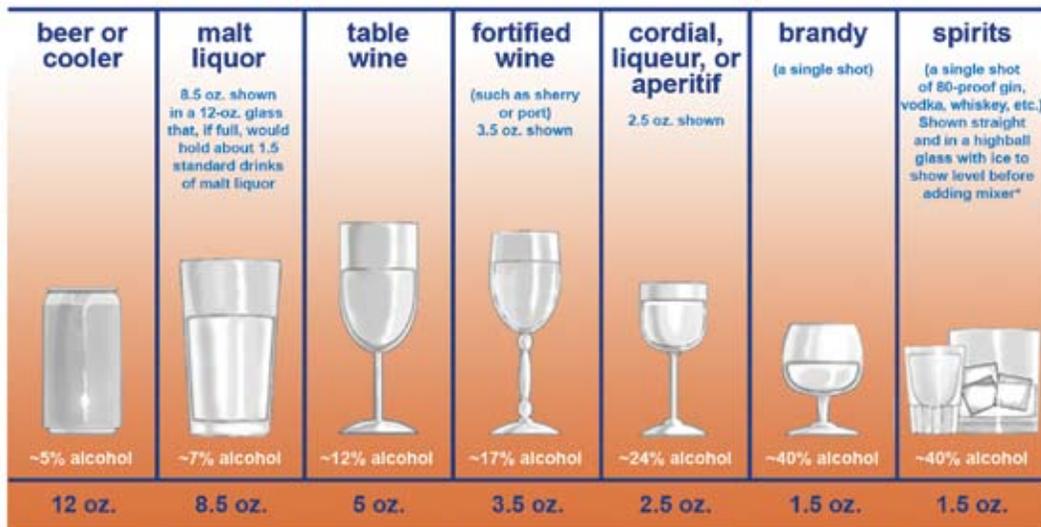


A drink can come in many forms. It can be a shot of hard liquor or a mixed drink containing vodka, rum, tequila, gin, scotch, etc. It can also be wine, a wine cooler, beer, or malt liquor.

A standard drink is any drink that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (about 0.6 fluid ounces or 1.2 tablespoons). This is the amount of alcohol usually found in—

- ◆ One 12-ounce beer
- ◆ One 4- to 5-ounce glass of wine
- ◆ One 1.5-ounce shot of 80 proof liquor

## What’s a Standard Drink?



\*Note: It can be difficult to estimate the number of standard drinks served in a single mixed drink made with hard liquor. Depending on factors, such as type of spirits and the recipe, one mixed drink can contain from one to three or more standard drinks.

But not all drinks are standard drinks. In fact, different drinks often have different amounts of alcohol. Mixed drinks may contain more than one shot of liquor, and different beers or wines may not have the same amount of alcohol in them, even when the drinks are the same size. For example, some beers and beer products, like “ice” beers, and malt liquors, and some wines, have more alcohol than others.

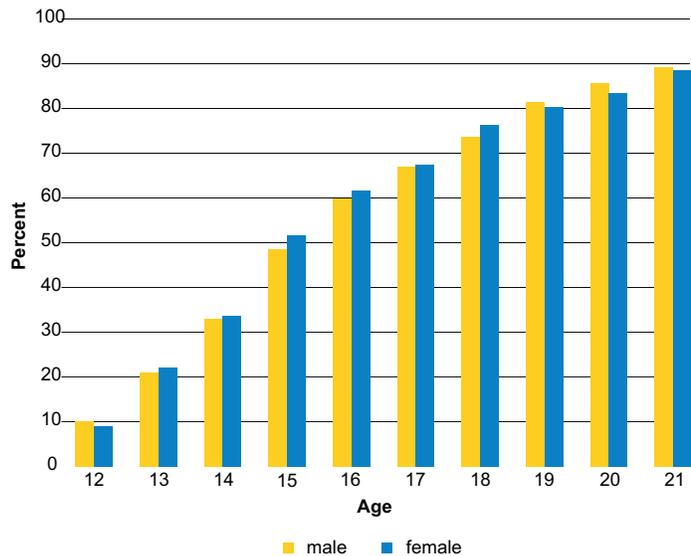
**Remember, the legal drinking age is 21 and underage drinking can be a threat to health and development.**

# WHY IS UNDERAGE DRINKING A PROBLEM?

**So many kids drink.** Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth. By age 18, more than 70% of teens have had at least one drink.

**When kids drink, they drink heavily.** Teens drink less frequently than adults, but when teens do drink, they drink more than adults. On average, youth have about five drinks on a single occasion. This is the definition of binge drinking, a very dangerous drinking pattern with potentially serious—sometimes lethal—consequences.

Percent of Youth Who Have Used Alcohol by Age and Gender



—SAMHSA, 2005 National Survey on Drug Use & Health (NSDUH)

**Underage drinkers are at risk for heavy drinking later in life.** Adults who report first using alcohol before age 15 are five times more likely to also report abuse of or dependence on alcohol than are adults who first used alcohol at age 21 or older. Approximately 40% of individuals who drink before age 15 report having symptoms at some point in their lives that fit a diagnosis of alcohol dependence. This is four times as many as among those who do not drink before age 21.

## FAST FACT

Death and injury rates increase 200% between the early teen years and early adult life, in large part because of dangerous activities like underage drinking. Preventing teen alcohol use saves lives.

**Alcohol may have a special allure for youth.** Adolescence is a time of adventure, of taking on new challenges, and of striving toward adulthood. It is also a time of sensation-seeking and increased risk-taking. Underage drinking is a risk many teens are willing to take, but it also is a risk for which teens may be unprepared. They may not anticipate just how alcohol affects their behavior and their bodies. As a result, underage drinking can have a damaging effect, not only on teens, but also on families, schools, communities, and the Nation as a whole. Often the consequences involve innocent victims.

# THE RESULTS OF UNDERAGE DRINKING CAN BE GRAVE

## Underage Alcohol Use—

- ◆ **Is a major cause of death from injuries among young people.** 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 motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 as a result of homicides, 300 from suicide, as well as hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings.
- ◆ **Increases the risk of carrying out, or being a victim of, physical or sexual assault.**
- ◆ **Can cause a range of physical consequences.** Physical effects of underage drinking range from hangovers to death from alcohol poisoning.
- ◆ **Is associated with other problems.** These may include academic failure, legal problems, and drug use.
- ◆ **Interferes with an adolescent's ability to judge risk and make sound decisions.** For example, after drinking, a teen may not fully appreciate the risk of driving a car “under the influence” or too fast, the risks of sexual activity, or the risk of aggressive or violent behavior. The result of such behaviors can be life-changing, whether as the result of illness or injury, or involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- ◆ **Plays a significant role in risky sexual behavior.** This leads to unwanted, unintended, and unprotected sexual activity, and sex with multiple partners. Such behavior increases the risk for unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including infection with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- ◆ **Can cause changes in the structure and function of the developing brain, especially when kids drink heavily.**  
This is a major concern because (1) the brain continues to develop into the mid-20s, (2) so many adolescents begin to drink at a young age, and (3) so many youth binge when they drink.





## Adolescence is a Time of Many Changes

- ◆ Adolescence is a time of dramatic physical growth and change.
- ◆ Adolescence is full of transitions—from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. Peer groups change; responsibilities increase (such as driving, additional chores, or paying jobs).
- ◆ Adolescents have greater independence from their parents and spend more time with peers and by themselves. They also tend to stay up later and sleep in.
- ◆ Adolescents are increasingly concerned about social status, are searching for self-identity, and are experiencing growing romantic and sexual interests.
- ◆ Adolescents experience greater emotional intensity and are particularly sensitive to their social environment and to highly emotional situations.
- ◆ During adolescence the desire for adventure, excitement, and action increases. So does the potential for greater risk-taking, independence-seeking, and a desire to try new things.

These changes are important steps on the road to adult life. However, these changes also increase the chance that some young people may turn to alcohol.

### **FAST FACT**

Factors in an adolescent's environment affect both the appeal of alcohol and its availability. Among these factors are the social systems within which teens function and with which they interact. Examples of these social systems are parents, friends, family, schools, and the community. The media and the larger social culture, including how alcohol is marketed and portrayed, also contribute to alcohol's appeal to young people.



## Why Teens May Choose to Drink

An adolescent's decision to use alcohol is influenced by many factors, some physical, some emotional, and some environmental. These factors also influence each other. They include—

- ◆ The social systems in which teens live
- ◆ The increase in risk-taking that usually accompanies adolescence
- ◆ Decreased parental supervision and greater independence
- ◆ Increased time spent alone and with peers
- ◆ Increased stress
- ◆ What adolescents see and hear about alcohol

### FAST FACT

Youth with histories of behavior problems (for example, delinquent activity, impulsive actions, and difficulty controlling responses) are more likely to use alcohol than are other young people. The same is true for youth who have an unusually strong desire for new experiences and sensations, and for those with histories of family conflict and stress, and/or alcohol problems.

# UNDERAGE DRINKING IS EVERYONE'S PROBLEM

## Underage drinking can affect anyone, including the teen who doesn't drink.

- ◆ Drinkers and non-drinkers alike can be affected by loud and aggressive behavior, property damage, injuries, violence, and even death resulting from underage alcohol use.
- ◆ About 45% of those who die in crashes involving a drinking driver under age 21 are people other than the driver.
- ◆ These “second-hand effects” often strike at random, making underage alcohol use truly everybody's problem.

### FAST FACT

Adolescents mature at different rates. Some grow up faster; others grow up more slowly. Risk and protective factors related to alcohol use shift throughout adolescence. Educators need to be alert to these changes and use different, developmentally appropriate approaches to help protect youth from underage alcohol use.

**After all, underage drinking places our Nation's most valuable resource—its youth—at risk.**

# PREVENTING AND REDUCING UNDERAGE DRINKING IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY.



## There is a role for everyone.

- ◆ Everyone needs to work together to change the culture around underage drinking.
- ◆ For youth themselves, prevention means understanding the dangers of alcohol use, changing how they think about drinking, and obeying the laws against consumption.
- ◆ For educators, prevention means being aware of how school and other social systems—families, students' peers, the larger community, the media, among others—can affect students' risks for underage drinking. It means taking action in a developmentally sensitive way to help students navigate the challenges of adolescence in positive ways, including rejecting underage alcohol consumption.

## FAST FACT

The majority of adolescents who start drinking do so when they are in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade and are about 13-14 years old. That's why parents, caregivers, teachers, and others should start talking with children about alcohol use well before the teen years and should continue talking with them throughout adolescence.

**It's time to stop accepting teen drinking as a rite of passage and to understand the threat it poses to healthy development. It's time to replace an environment that all too often enables underage alcohol use with an environment that discourages it.**

# WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO ABOUT UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE

**Although underage drinking is widespread, underage alcohol use is not inevitable.**

Schools and teachers have a significant impact on an adolescent's life. The climate and cohesiveness of a school can play an important role in the development of an adolescent's self-identity. Schools and teachers can help change attitudes about teen drinking and help replace environments that enable underage alcohol use with environments that discourage it.

## Schools and Teachers Can:

**Help create an environment that can protect youth from underage drinking.**

- ◆ Encourage student involvement in school, a factor in reducing underage alcohol use.
- ◆ Create an environment that helps students explore their talents and follow their passions, whether academic, musical, sports, or social or community causes.
- ◆ Provide students opportunities for validation and belonging.
- ◆ Increase positive outcomes for adolescents by being a mentor, a valued teacher, or other caring adult.
- ◆ Provide information to parents on the consequences of underage alcohol use, school policies and practices on alcohol use, and local sources for more information.
- ◆ Recognize that significant social transitions (such as graduating to middle or high school or getting a driver's license) are accompanied by increasing responsibility, freedom, social pressure, and/or more demanding academic requirements, all of which may increase the likelihood of alcohol use. At such times, teachers and staff can be particularly alert and supportive. Consider making a special effort to connect students with an adult who can serve as a mentor and confidant.
- ◆ Recognize that children who mature earlier or later than the majority of their peers may be at increased risk.
- ◆ Provide and promote multiple venues where adolescents can get together with their friends.

## **Decrease the risk of adolescent alcohol use and the associated negative consequences.**

- ◆ Discourage violation of alcohol rules by consistently enforcing them.
- ◆ Provide students with the developmentally appropriate knowledge, skills, and motivation to resist peer and other pressures to drink.
- ◆ Identify and refer students using alcohol for appropriate interventions. Ensure that school nurses are trained to recognize alcohol-related problems, to intervene appropriately when problems are found, and to be familiar with the referral network.
- ◆ Work with the community to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place so students in need of services and treatment can be referred to appropriate personnel or health care providers.
- ◆ Establish and enforce strict policies against alcohol use on school property and at school events.
- ◆ Only sponsor interventions that research has confirmed are effective in preventing and reducing underage alcohol use.



## **Working with Others**

Teachers can be a positive force in a student's life, and that can help prevent underage drinking. Teachers also need the help and support of parents and communities. Schools can work with others to ensure that—

- ◆ Families, school colleagues, and communities support and reward an adolescent's decision not to drink.
- ◆ Protective rules around adolescent alcohol use are in place, penalties for violations are well known, and enforcement is sure and uniform.
- ◆ All laws related to underage alcohol use are regularly publicized and well enforced.
- ◆ Parties and other social events do not allow underage drinking.

# ADVANCING THE CALL TO ACTION

The *Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* was developed to expand public knowledge about underage drinking and to encourage action by individuals and organizations nationwide. Each person in America has a role to play to help prevent and reduce underage alcohol use. This *Call to Action* is designed to help America rethink underage drinking as we know it today. It provides the tools to get the word out in discussions around the dinner table, in school or campus-based programs, and in communities. It can also inform local, Tribal, State, and national programs and policies.

Teachers, parents, and others who work with children and youth are better able to protect adolescents from the negative consequences of alcohol use when they understand how underage drinking affects the development of a child's, or adolescent's body and brain. Teachers and other educators can more effectively influence adolescent decisions about drinking when they recognize, appreciate, and respond to individual characteristics of the adolescent. Finally, teachers and other educators can help create a more protective environment for adolescents when they work with other educators, parents, health care professionals, communities, and policymakers to prevent and reduce underage drinking.

This *Call to Action* is exactly that: a call to every American to join with the Surgeon General in a national effort to address underage drinking early, continuously, and in the context of human development. Underage alcohol use is everyone's problem—and its *solutions are everyone's responsibility*.

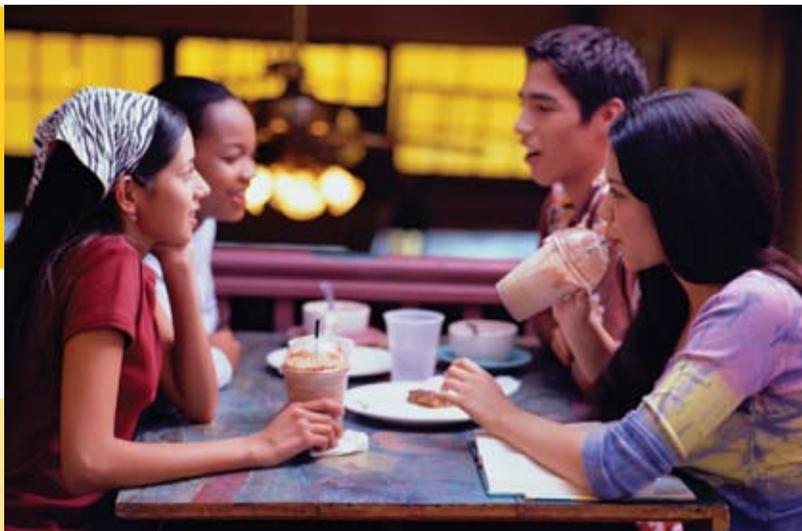
## References for "A Guide to Action for Educators"

*The data, facts, and suggestions presented here come primarily from the Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking, cited on the inside front cover. Other sources of some data presented in this document include:*

Grant BF, Dawson DA, Stinson FS, Chou SP, Dufour MC, Pickering RP. The 12-month prevalence and trends in DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: United States, 1991-1992 and 2001-2002. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 74:223-234, 2004.

Johnston LD, O'Malley PM, Bachman JG, Schulenberg JE. (December 21, 2006). *Teen drug use continues down in 2006, particularly among older teens; but use of prescription-type drugs remains high*. University of Michigan News and Information Services: Ann Arbor, MI. [On-line]. Available: [www.monitoringthefuture.org](http://www.monitoringthefuture.org); accessed 01/03/07.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Results from the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*. Rockville (MD): U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; 2006. Available: [www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm](http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm); accessed 01/03/07.



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# FOR MORE INFORMATION

*Underage drinking is a public health and safety problem that results in serious personal, social, and economic consequences for adolescents, their families, communities, and the Nation as a whole. Your involvement can make a difference.*

Many free sources of information are available to help you take action to prevent and reduce underage drinking. Some of the materials can help you better educate your students and their families, your colleagues, and your community about the dangers of underage drinking and how to help stop it before it starts.

- ◆ To read the entire *Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking*, be sure to log on to the Surgeon General's Web site at [www.surgeongeneral.gov](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov).
- ◆ For more information about ways you can help to prevent and reduce underage drinking in your community, please check out, [www.stopalcoholabuse.gov](http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov), a comprehensive portal of Federal resources for information on underage drinking and ideas for combating the problem.
- ◆ Another excellent source of information is the Web site of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>.
- ◆ General information about underage drinking, its effects on adolescents, families, and communities, and what you can do to help stop underage drinking is available through the National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI), on the Internet at <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/> or by calling (800) 729-6686.

The words and images in this Guide to Action were designed to reach a broad audience. Copies of this booklet and the *Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* can be downloaded from both of the Web sites noted. To order copies by mail, please contact the National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/> or by calling (800) 729-6686.

