



Department of Health
140 County Highway 33W
Suite 3
Cooperstown, NY 13326
Phone: (607) 547-4230
Fax: (607) 547-4385

NEWS RELEASE
Teen Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol can be a dangerous drug for anyone, but especially for teenagers who lack the experience and maturity needed to avoid the worst pitfalls.

The consequences of teenage alcohol abuse can be severe and even fatal. They include alcohol poisoning, a decline in academic performance, risky sexual behavior, and death and injury due to drinking and driving.

“Nationally, about 5,000 people under the age of 21 die because of underage drinking every year. The great majority of these deaths are caused by motor vehicle injuries. Other causes of alcohol-related deaths include drowning, suicide, and homicide,” said Sue Smith, Deputy Director of the Otsego County Department of Health.

Many teens start drinking around the age of 13, and most under the age of 21 have at times consumed more than five drinks on one occasion. After age 21, drinking habits generally tend to decline gradually.

Teens see adults drink at home and at social functions and are exposed to countless messages to drink. Familiarity with alcohol may make teens feel casual about its use, so they don’t fully appreciate the risks of binge drinking or drinking while driving.

“Binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks in a row, is a serious and all too common problem for young drinkers,” Sue Smith said. “Binge drinking is considered by school officials to be one of the most serious problems on campus.

“As a parent you can play a critical role in your child’s decision-making regarding alcohol. Just be sure that the discussion does not become a lecture. There are several topics that you can touch on during the conversation. They include your child’s views about alcohol consumption versus the realities. Find out what their knowledge of teen drinking is and why they think others their age drink,” she said.

“Let your children express themselves completely without interruption. This will make them feel respected and will promote a healthier dialogue,” she said.

This discussion would be a great opportunity for you to dispel common myths about alcohol use. For example, they may believe that beer contains less alcohol than wine and liquor. Twelve ounces of beer, five ounces of wine or one-and-a-half ounces of liquor each contain the same amount of alcohol and have the same effects on the body and brain.

New York State, like many others, has taken steps to reduce the number of motor vehicle fatalities due to alcohol. A Zero Tolerance law makes it illegal for a driver under age 21 to consume any alcohol. If their Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) is .02 to .07 percent, they will face a penalty of a six-month license suspension and up to \$225 in fines.

To learn more about how to prevent teenage alcohol abuse, call the Otsego County Department of Health at (607) 547-4230.

Otsego County Department of Health
140 County Highway 33W-Suite 3
Cooperstown, NY 13326
(607) 547-4230