



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
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May 12, 2010 – Good Night or Good-Bye?

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership Centre Region *Communities That Care*. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

Good night or good bye? Alcohol poisoning happens quickly and with deadly consequences. Making a decision to let an intoxicated friend or family member “sleep it off” may be the worst decision of a lifetime. Tragically, saying good night may turn out to be a final good bye.

Alcohol is such a powerful drug that with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of around .01 (just 1/100th of your blood), your brain stops forming memories because it shifts the priority from thinking and memory formation to the basics of staying alive (keeping your heart beating and your lungs breathing). Alcohol poisoning occurs when the body becomes poisoned by large amounts of alcohol consumed in a short period of time.

What can happen if you take the risk of saying good night and leaving someone alone to sleep it off?

- Vomiting is usually the first symptom of alcohol poisoning. Persons who are intoxicated, especially if they are unconscious, may choke on their own vomit since alcohol depresses the gag reflex.
- Skin becomes pale or blue-tinged as breathing slows (less than eight breaths per minute), becomes irregular, or stops.
- Heart beats irregularly or stops.
- Hypothermia (low body temperature) begins.
- Hypoglycemia (too little blood sugar) leads to seizures.
- Untreated severe dehydration from vomiting can cause seizures, permanent brain damage, or death.

Although a person may appear to be sleeping it off, alcohol in the stomach will continue to enter the bloodstream and circulate throughout the body. Because of this, a person's blood-alcohol level will continue to rise even after they stop drinking. The person's life may still be in danger.

Alcohol poisoning can lead to irreversible brain damage even if the victim survives. Binge drinking is especially dangerous because the victim can consume a fatal dose before becoming unconscious.

Mount Nittany Medical Center data on Penn State students, about half of whom are minors, shows that alcohol-related emergency room visits are increasing. The average blood-alcohol level of those being treated is up. In 2008-2009, the number of alcohol-related emergency room visits was 586, a 30% increase over any of the previous four years. More than 77% of those seen had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) above the legal driving limit. Overall trends also indicate a steady increase in average BAC level between 2004 and 2009.

What should you do if you suspect someone has alcohol poisoning? Never assume that the person will sleep it off. Call 911 immediately. Always stay with the person until medical help arrives.

If the person is conscious and vomiting:

- Prevent choking.
- Prevent drowning in toilet.
- Talk to the person.

If a person is blacking out or unconscious:

- Talk to the person to try to keep the person awake.
- If the person is lying down, roll the person onto the left side to prevent choking if they vomit.

Don't say good night to someone who has had too much to drink. It's a risk you can't afford to take.

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Alcohol is such a powerful drug that 1/3 of only 1 percent of your blood or 1/3 or 1/100th of your blood, will put many people close to being in a coma.

or

Another way of thinking about the effects of alcohol is that at around 1/10 of only 1 percent of your blood or 1/10 or 1/100th of your blood, your brain stops forming memories because it shifts the priority from thinking and memory formation to the basics of staying alive (keeping your heart beating and keeping your lungs breathing). This is what we refer to as a black out and it starts to occur with a BAC of around .01. Alcohol is such a powerful drug that 1/3 of only 1 percent of your blood or 1/3 or 1/100th of your blood, will put many people close to being in a coma.

or

Alcohol is such a powerful drug that a third of only 1 percent of your blood will put many people close to being in a coma.

Alcohol is such a powerful drug that with a BAC of around .01 (1/100th of your blood), your brain stops forming memories because it shifts the priority from thinking and memory formation to the basics of staying alive (keeping your heart beating and keeping your lungs breathing). This is what we refer to as a black out.

Good night or good bye? Alcohol poisoning happens quickly and with deadly consequences. Making a decision to let an intoxicated friend or family member “sleep it off” may be the worst decision of a lifetime. Tragically, saying good night may turn out to be a final good bye.

What is alcohol poisoning? It is exactly what it sounds like. It occurs when the body becomes poisoned by large amounts of alcohol consumed in a short period of time.

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- Vomiting is usually the first symptom of alcohol poisoning. Persons who are intoxicated, especially if they are unconscious, may choke on their own vomit since alcohol depresses the gag reflex.
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Mount Nittany Medical Center data on Penn State students, about half of whom are minors, shows that alcohol-related emergency room visits are increasing. The average blood-alcohol level of those being treated is up. In 2008-09, the number of alcohol-related emergency room visits was 586, a 30% increase over any of the previous four years. More than 77% of those seen had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) above the legal driving limit. In 2008-09 the average BAC level was .253, an increase from the 2007-08 rate of .250. The overall trend indicates a steady increase in average BAC level between 2004 and 2009.

What should you do if you suspect someone has alcohol poisoning? Never assume that a person who has been drinking excessively will sleep it off. Call 911 immediately. If possible, be prepared to tell emergency personnel the kind and amount of alcohol consumed. Always stay with the person until medical help arrives.

If the person is conscious and vomiting:

- Prevent choking.
- Prevent drowning in toilet.
- Talk to the person.

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