



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



ARTICLE 2 – MARCH 24, 2008 - UNDERAGE DRINKING

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Much has changed over the last 50 years. As a society, we are more focused on prevention and safety and in small daily ways we are bettering our health and our lives, such as by wearing seat belts and insisting our children wear bike helmets. Yet, during this same time, alcohol marketing and usage has changed dramatically, dangerously influencing our youth. Alcohol ads are seen on billboards, in magazines, in gas stations, in restaurants, and in movies and on TV. Corporate sponsorship of festivals and sporting events has branded many alcoholic beverages – making them easily recognizable by both adults and youth. And alcohol producers now offer sweetened alcoholic beverages that appeal to more female and younger drinkers. The taste may be masked with fruity flavors, but the alcohol content and potential for intoxication is just as great. In this new culture of alcohol acceptance, how do parents and adult role models help teens to understand the dangers of underage drinking?

The disapproval of caring adults is the strongest influence on a youth's decision to not use alcohol. We live in a proud, family-friendly, and safe community, but our youth are not immune to the cultural pressures that encourage underage drinking. Pennsylvania Youth Survey data shows that up to 5.4% of Centre County children ages 11-12 years old report using alcohol in the past 30 days. The rates climbs as youth enter high school. Many young people feel that drinking is a way for them to feel more grown-up, but don't understand the risks and consequences of engaging in adult behavior. Up to 43.7% of local 17-18 year olds report using alcohol in the past 30 days. These figures are alarming as the following statistics reflect some of the dangers:

- Alcohol is the drug of choice among America's adolescents; It is used more than tobacco or illicit drugs. Each year, about 5,000 people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking. Alcohol use kills 6.5 times more young people than all other illicit drugs combined.
- People who begin drinking before age 15 are 4 times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than individuals who begin drinking after age 21.
- In a national survey conducted in 2005, one in ten teens reported that within the previous month they had driven after drinking. Nearly 30% reported that they had ridden with a driver who had been drinking. About 45% of people who die in car crashes involving a drinking driver under the age of 21 are people other than the driver.

Centre County is one of hundreds of communities nationwide that will be holding an Underage Drinking Prevention: Town Hall Meeting. You are invited to attend on April 1 from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at the Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology in Pleasant Gap. Take this an opportunity to learn about local concerns from law enforcement and others, to access prevention resources, and to share your perspective on the influences upon local underage drinking.

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