

## Alcohol remains costliest, most lethal problem

Alcohol is more dangerous than illegal drugs like heroin and crack cocaine, according to a new study.

British experts evaluated substances including alcohol, cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and marijuana, and ranked them on how destructive they are to the individual who takes them – and to society as a whole.

The analysis took into consideration how addictive a drug is and how it harms the human body. It also looked at environmental damage caused by the drug, its role in breaking up families, and its economic costs, such as healthcare, social services and prison.

**When linked to an earlier study that said one in 25 deaths worldwide is caused by alcohol consumption, booze is now as damaging to global health as smoking was a decade ago.**

Tobacco still accounts for more disease, according to the World Health Organization, but the social and economic costs of alcohol are higher. Drinkers and smokers both burden healthcare, but booze-related violence, drunken driving, demands on law-enforcement, and other impacts keep alcohol atop the list of Worst Substances.

Jürgen Rehm of the University of Toronto told *TIME* magazine that an increase in alcohol consumption was primarily the result of more women taking up drinking. He said a jump in the rate of alcohol-related deaths is particularly troubling for two reasons: First, researchers took into account the cardiovascular benefits of moderate drinking; second, a majority of the world's people abstain from alcohol.

The latter is likely to change as India and China become wealthier and their citizens find themselves with more disposable income, Rehm said. That,



**NO REASON TO CELEBRATE** – Recent studies suggest that while some BC youth are waiting longer to try alcohol, a disturbing rise in binge drinking is also evident. Other research shows that girls are nearly as likely as guys to overdo it.

in turn, is likely to further increase the death rate unless steps are taken to combat the trend.

“Alcohol consumption, particularly among women, is linked to economic growth,” he said. “In countries like the U.K. and Norway, you have women consuming over 30 percent of [all the alcohol consumed] ... In India, on the other extreme, women consume less than 5 percent. The higher the wealth of a country, the higher the percentage of women drinking alcohol.”

**According to Rehm, consumption rates mean that “globally, the effect of alcohol on the burden of disease is about the same size as that of smoking in 2000.” In fact, despite**

**the prevalence of tobacco use in the developing world, his research shows alcohol as the No. 1 risk factor in 27 emerging economies.**

The British study comparing alcohol to illegal drugs found that heroin, crack cocaine and methamphetamine (crystal meth) were most lethal to individuals. When considering their wider social effects, alcohol, heroin and crack were the deadliest. Still, alcohol outranked all other substances overall, with marijuana, ecstasy and LSD scoring far lower.

Professor David Nutt, author of the British study, told the BBC alcohol is the most dangerous drug because it's also the most popular:

“Crack cocaine is more addictive than alcohol, but because alcohol is so widely used that (millions) of people crave it every day and will go to extraordinary lengths to get it.”

“Drugs that are legal cause at least as much damage, if not more, than drugs that are illicit,” said Prof. Wim van den Brink. “Alcohol is connected to higher death rates and is involved in a greater percentage of crime than most other drugs, including heroin.”

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**DON'T BE FOOLED** – New research shows that letting youth drink at home – even in a structured, supervised, limited way – does more harm than good.

## Dinnertime drink with parents is counterproductive for young teens

**Responsible parents who let their children have the odd glass of wine or beer at home when they are in their early teens are doing them more harm than good, a new study finds.**

Many mothers and fathers think that allowing their children to have a supervised drink is a good way of exposing them to alcohol safely and taking away its illicit thrill.

But new research suggests it sends mixed signals that result in them being more likely to abuse alcohol as they enter their core teenage years.

A joint American-Australian study of more than 1,900 12- and 13-year-olds found that those whose parents took such a “harm minimisation” approach were more likely to have experienced “alcohol-related consequences” within two years (such as not being able to stop drinking, getting into fights, or having blackouts) than those whose parents had a “zero-tolerance” strategy.

A year into the study, almost twice as many Australian teens (67 percent) had drunk alcohol in the presence of an adult than their American counterparts (35 percent), reflecting general attitudes in Australia and the U.S. when it comes to supervised underage drinking.

The following year, just over a third (36 per cent) of the Australians had experienced alcohol-related consequences compared to only a fifth (21 per cent) of the Americans.

While cultural differences alone could account for the disparity, the results also found that teens who had been allowed to drink were more likely to have had such experiences regardless of which country they were from.

A Dutch study of 500 12- to-15-year-olds found that it was the amount of alcohol available at home, and not how much parents drank, that determined teenage drinking habits – which suggests that parents should keep their drink cabinets locked.

Dr. Barbara McMorris, who led the first study, said: “Both studies show that parents matter. Despite peers and friends becoming important influences as adolescents get older, parents still have a big impact ...

**“Kids need parents to be parents and not drinking buddies. Adults need to be clear about sending kids black-and-white messages early on.**

“Such messages will help reinforce limits as teens get older and opportunities to drink increase.”

## Kids get alcohol at home, not liquor store

**Parents are giving their children alcoholic beverages at a much higher rate than most people realize.**

In the past month alone, more than 200,000 U.S. kids were given alcohol by a parent or other adult family member, according to a new report from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Administrator Pamela Hyde.

“People who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are six times more likely than those who start at age 21 and older to develop alcohol problems,” Hyde said. “Parents and other adults need to be aware that providing alcohol to children can expose them to an increased risk for alcohol abuse and set them on a path with increased potential for addiction.”

“Almost 6 percent of 12- to 14-year-olds have used alcohol in the past month. That’s a pretty large number,” said SAMHSA’s Peter Delany, adding:

**“Almost all of these kids got that alcohol for free – from someone’s home. Parents say, ‘Well, at least they’re drinking at home and not on the street, or at least they are not smoking pot’ – all kind of silly things.**

“If you want to have a big impact on preventing problems with youth alcohol use, it starts at home. This is a wholly preventable behavior.”

In fact, about 45 percent got alcohol from a parent or other family member, or they took it from their home without permission, Delany added. About 15 percent just took the liquor; almost 16 percent got it directly from a parent or guardian; and another 14 percent got it from another relative.

“This is something we have known: kids do get their alcohol at home,” added Dr. Gwen Wurm of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. “As parents, we need to guide our children into the kind of appropriate choices they can be making.”

In 2003, the average age of first use was about 14, compared to over 17 in 1965. People who start drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to also report meeting the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lives.

## Quebec coroner wants youth curfew to fight drunk driving

Lawmakers must curb drunk-driving deaths by imposing a curfew on young drivers while ordering automakers to equip all new cars with speed regulators and alcohol interlock devices, says a Quebec coroner.

Yvon Garneau's recommendations are included in a report into the deaths of four young men east of Montreal.

The four youths had just left a party last October where they had played a drinking game known as beer pong. The driver, Carl Francoeur-Ouellette, 22, had twice the legal alcohol limit in his system when his car slammed into a tree, killing himself and his three childhood friends.

The coroner says speeding, alcohol and recklessness were to blame, and that legislators must impose severe measures on all young drivers.

"Impaired driving and speed continue to wreak havoc and often (claim) innocent victims," wrote Garneau.

**He said Quebec should follow the lead of Ontario, which bars people under 19 from driving be-**



**FORTUNATE** – Youth who are stopped for impaired driving are lucky: Others end up in a morgue, not a drunk tank.

**tween midnight and 5 a.m. Garneau says Quebec should go even further.**

"I recommend the (auto-insurance board) amend the highway safety code to impose a curfew between midnight and 5 a.m. for drivers 24 and under, with the exception of work and studies," he said.

Garneau is the second Quebec coroner in the last three years to recommend a curfew for young drivers.

The father of the dead motorist told the press that a curfew would be severe, but justified if it saves lives.

"I don't want four children to have died for nothing," said Lucien Ouellette, whose son was studying to be a computer programmer. "This accident happened to wake people up."

## Study links alcohol to computer usage

Teenagers who drink alcohol spend more time on their computers for recreational use, including social networking, and downloading and listening to music compared with peers who don't drink.

Results of an anonymous survey of 264 teens were reported in the journal *Addictive Behaviors* in a study by Weill Cornell Medical College public health researcher Dr. Jennifer Epstein.

"While the specific factors linking teenage drinking and computer use are not yet established, it seems likely that adolescents are experimenting with drinking and activities on the Internet. In turn, exposure to online material such as alcohol ads or alcohol-using peers on social-networking sites could reinforce teens' drinking," said Dr. Epstein.

"Children are being exposed to computers and the Internet at younger ages. For this reason, it's important that parents are actively involved in monitoring their children's computer usage, as well as alcohol use," she added.

According to a U.S. study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, more than half of teens' parents had filters installed on their child's computers to block objectionable content; yet many parents do little monitoring, particularly for older teens.

The Cornell survey was completed by U.S. participants ages 13 to 17. It showed that teens who reported drinking in the last month used a computer more hours per week (excluding school work) than those who did not; however, there was no apparent link between alcohol use and computer use for school.

Drinking was also linked to more frequent social networking and listening to and downloading music. There was no strong link between drinking and video games or online shopping.

"Going forward, we would like to collect more detailed and longer-term data on adolescent alcohol and computer use, including the degree and duration of their drinking habit," said Dr. Epstein.

Teens typically first experiment with alcohol at age 12 or 13. "Parents need to reinforce family ground rules on alcohol use and computer use," Dr. Epstein advised.

## Alcohol blamed for rise in liver problems

Growing numbers of people in Ireland are developing liver disease in their 20s and 30s because of heavy boozing, according to new research.

A rise in alcohol abuse, including binge drinking, is fueling a worrying increase in liver problems at a younger age. The rate of liver-related death and illness in all age groups has almost doubled in just 13 years, with a particular rise in younger ages.

The grim toll that the booze culture is taking on health is revealed by Health Research Board researchers who found the rate of liver disease and deaths almost tripled between 1995 and 2007, going from 28.3 per 100,000 adults to 82.2.

Seventy percent of afflicted patients were male, but there was a higher proportion of females in the youngest group. The study did not include those with liver disease who may have died outside the public hospital system – so the real toll may be higher.

"These results indicate that there has been a genuine increase in the occurrence of and mortality from adult liver disease, and this is consistent with a rise in per capita consumption and harmful drinking patterns," said researcher Deirdre Mongan.

The researchers say the trend among younger age groups is worrying, "but is not surprising as survey data has shown that 18- to 29-year-old drinkers have the highest level of alcohol consumption among Irish drinkers, and two-fifths binge drink weekly," according to Mongan.

Seven in 10 of those who died of liver disease were under 65.

# Spring to talk with your kids about alcohol

April was Alcohol Awareness Month, and with prom and graduation season at hand, there's never a more appropriate time to talk with your teen about the dangers of underage drinking.

Most parents have heard the message: Talk to your kids about alcohol abuse. But it's hard to know when and how to initiate the conversation.

Here are some tips from the experts:

- Don't wait until your kids are teenagers to start talking. "Tweens" (9 to 13) look to their parents for guidance about alcohol.

- Talk often. One big conversation about alcohol won't do the trick. Kids run into different situations as they get older, so you need to have the conversation over and over.

- Take advantage of daily opportunities to talk – without clobbering your child with your opinions. Use a news article or current event about alcohol as a way of raising the issue. Give your reaction to these examples; ask your child for his. Listen carefully, and don't criticize



his answers. Make it a discussion, not an argument. Learn from each other.

- Give your kids lots of information about how alcohol affects them physiologically, such as how it can reduce inhibitions and lead to risky behavior, interfere with normal brain development, and over time damage their kidneys, liver, and pancreas.

- Help your kids have some answers ready for when they find themselves confronted with the decision not to

drink. Their responses should be short and direct, such as, "No way! My parents will ground me for a month." Weak-sounding answers like "I don't think that's a good idea" invite debate, which may wear down the child's resolve if the other person keeps trying to sway them.

- Be ready for your kids' questions, such as, "Grown-ups drink alcohol, so why can't I?" Or, "What about evidence that says alcohol is good for you?"

You'll find answers to their questions and more good ideas online by going to <http://www.asklistenlearn.com> (How to Talk to Your Adolescent About Alcohol). Your kids can learn about alcohol on their own at the same site (Kids and Alcohol Don't Mix) or by going to <http://www.thecoolspot.gov>

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## – WARNING –

# Alcohol + energy drinks = trouble

**New concerns are being raised by a study of the increased risks of combining alcohol with an energy drink.**

Mixing vodka with Red Bull (one popular combo) is riskier than drinking alcohol alone, because it effectively removes any built-in checks the body has for overindulging.

"Even with just alcohol, young, underage drinkers are bad at deciding how safe a driver they are, but I think this would make that situation far worse," said Researcher Cecile Marczinski of Northern Kentucky University.

"Drinking can give you a feeling of extreme 'happiness,' but when you overindulge, your body knows it, and it starts to shut down; you start feeling tired, sleepy and more sedated than stimulated. That spells bedtime," Marczinski said. "People downing the combination of alcohol and energy drinks lose this natural control."

"The disconnect between what you feel and how you act is what is the prob-

lem here. Stimulation may not be a good thing when you're drinking because you may drink longer, decide to stay at a party where you're drinking longer, and drink far more than you originally intended," said Marczinski.

**An estimated 30 percent to 50 percent of teens and young adults in the U.S. and Canada consume energy drinks, which often contain high amounts of caffeine or stimulant such as guarana.**

The study showed that the high level of caffeine masks the effects of the alcohol, so people drinking the combination feel less impaired than they really are. Some people refer to the state of intoxication the consumer feels by these drinks as being "wide-awake drunk."

Parents, health and public-safety officials are concerned that those people who "combine booze and Bull" are more likely to drink more, drive, swim, or attempt other foolish behaviours while feeling this intoxication.



### Available Resources & Workshops

#### **Making Decisions Series**

A leading education initiative to combat drug and alcohol abuse and encourage social responsibility.

Grades 4, 6, 7, 8 & 9 [<more info](#)

#### **Parents as Preventors™**

Workshops designed for parents, emphasizing the central role they play in influencing their children to make healthy choices regarding alcohol, tobacco and other drugs [<more info](#)

[drugfacts.ca](http://drugfacts.ca)

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