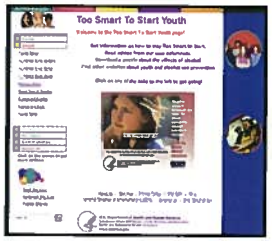
You probably see and hear a lot about alcohol—from TV, movies, music, and your friends. But what are the real facts about underage alcohol use? Inside are some common myths—and sobering facts—about alcohol use:

Do you think you or a friend has an alcohol problem?

Don't wait—get help. Talk to a parent, doctor, teacher, or anyone you trust. For information and referrals, contact SAMHSA's Health Information Network at 877-SAMHSA-7 (877-726-4727) (TDD 800-487-4889; linea gratis en español 877-767-8432).

Also, check out the "Youth" sections of the Federal portal of underage drinking prevention resources at www.stopalcoholabuse.gov and the Too Smart to Start site at http://toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov.

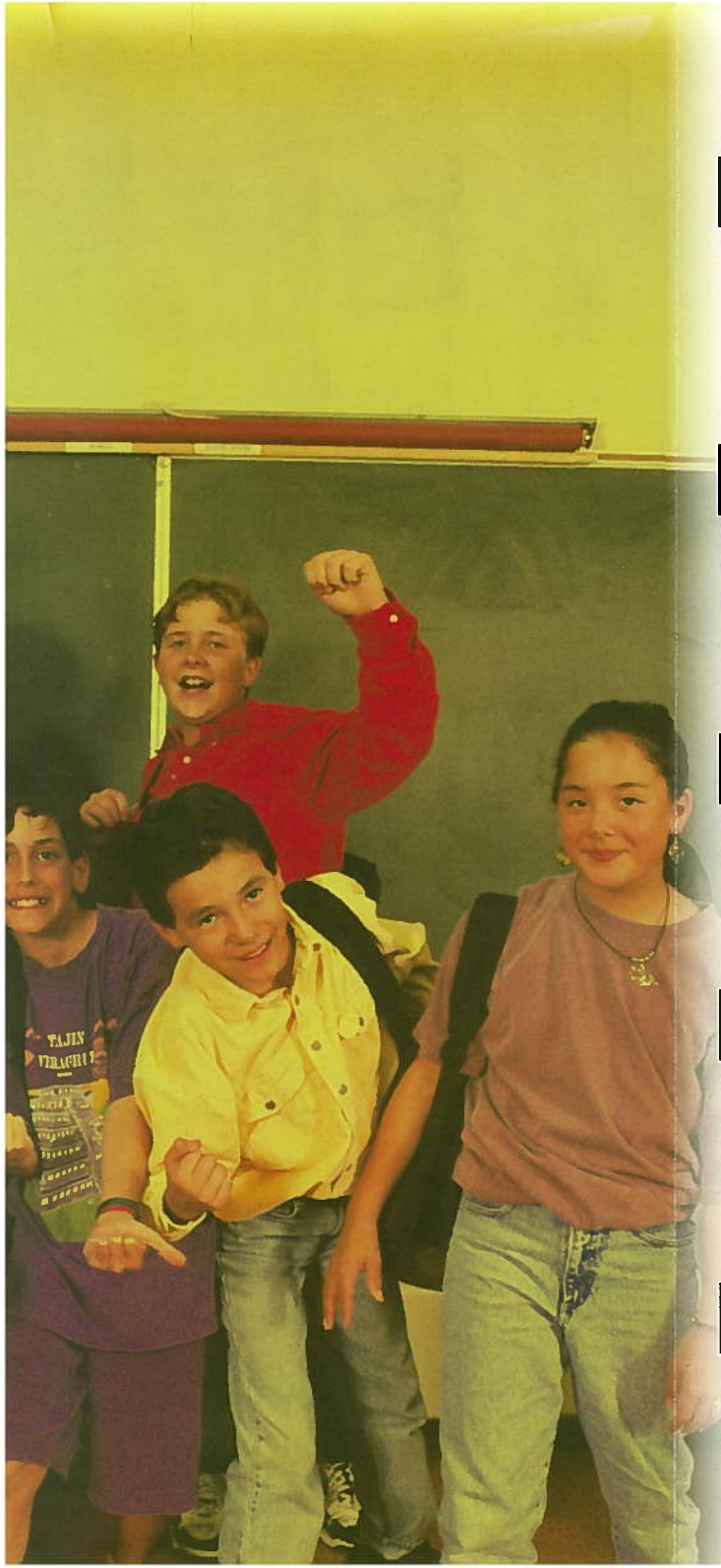


Underage Drinking

Myths vs. Facts

A Life in the Community for Everyone
SAMHSA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention



Myth Alcohol isn't as harmful as other drugs.

FACT Alcohol increases your risk for many deadly diseases, such as cancer. Drinking too much alcohol too quickly can lead to alcohol poisoning, which can kill you.

Myth Drinking is a good way to loosen up at parties.

FACT Drinking is a dumb way to loosen up. It can make you act silly, say things you shouldn't say, and do things you wouldn't normally do (like get into fights or have sex).

Myth Drinking alcohol will make me cool.

FACT There's nothing cool about stumbling around, passing out, or puking on yourself. Drinking alcohol also can cause bad breath and weight gain.

Myth All of the other kids drink alcohol. I need to drink to fit in.

FACT If you really want to fit in, stay sober. Most young people don't drink alcohol. Research shows that more than 70 percent of youth aged 12 to 20 haven't had a drink in the past month.[1]

Myth I can sober up quickly by taking a cold shower or drinking coffee.

FACT On average, it takes 2 to 3 hours for a single drink to leave the body. Nothing can speed up the process, including drinking coffee, taking a cold shower, or "walking it off."

Myth Adults drink, so kids should be able to drink too.

FACT A young person's brain and body are still growing. Drinking alcohol can cause learning problems or lead to adult alcoholism. People who begin drinking by age 15 are five times more likely to abuse or become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking after age 20.[2]

Myth Beer and wine are safer than liquor.

FACT Alcohol is alcohol...it can cause you problems no matter how you consume it. One 12-ounce bottle of beer or a 5-ounce glass of wine (about a half-cup) has as much alcohol as a 1.5-ounce shot of liquor. Alcopops—sweet drinks laced with malt liquor—often contain more alcohol than beer!

Myth I can drink alcohol and not have any problems.

FACT If you're under 21, drinking alcohol is a big problem: It's illegal. If caught, you may have to pay a fine, perform community service, or take alcohol awareness classes. Kids who drink also are more likely to get poor grades in school, and are at higher risk for being a crime victim.

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[1] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2007). 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).
[2] SAMHSA. (2004). The NSDUH Report: Alcohol Dependence or Abuse and Age at First Use.