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## Myths and facts help teens understand underage alcohol abuse

By Charlotte Tallman For the Sun-News

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Throughout the day, teens come across many venues that promote alcohol. There are television shows that make it fun, movies that make it sophisticated and music that endorses it, but at the end of the day, every teen should know the real facts about underage alcohol use.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration created the "Underage Drinking Myths vs. Facts" brochure to educate teens about the sobering facts of underage alcohol use. Teen surveys, like one conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, shows teens want, and even expect, their parents to play a key role in their lives. Research also shows that kids who learn from their parents about the dangers of risky behaviors like drug use, underage drinking, tobacco use and dangerous driving are less likely to engage in those behaviors. Parents are encouraged to go over the myths and facts below with their teens.

**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).

**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 age 12 to 20 haven't had a drink in the past month.

**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, not even 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.

The Myths vs. Facts brochure is available locally

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through the Unified Prevention! (UP!) Border Region Coalition, an initiative of the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico, at 301 S. Church St., Suite H, or by calling (575) 521-4794.

A Community That's Aware is a Community that Cares is submitted by Charlotte Tallman, media campaign coordinator for the Unified Prevention! (UP!) Coalition for a Drug-Free Do a Ana County, an initiative of the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico. For more information on the coalition, visit [www.unifiedprevention.com](http://www.unifiedprevention.com) or contact Jaylene McIntosh at (575) 521-4794 or [jaylene@cfsnm.org](mailto:jaylene@cfsnm.org)



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