



The Surgeon General's *Call to Action* to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking

“Alcohol remains the most heavily abused substance by America’s youth. We can no longer ignore what alcohol is doing to our children. This *Call to Action* is exactly that a call to every American to join with the Surgeon General in a national effort to address underage drinking early, continuously, and in context of human development. Underage drinking is everybody’s problem and its solution is everyone’s responsibility.”

—Acting Surgeon General Kenneth P. Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H

What is the *Call to Action*?

- Consistent with other Surgeon General *Calls to Action*, this science-based document seeks to stimulate action in all sectors of society to solve a major public health problem. It is supported by specific action steps to achieve the goals of the Call to Action at the national, state, and community levels.

Why is the Surgeon General issuing this *Call to Action* to all Americans?

- Alcohol is the drug of choice among American adolescents, used by more young people than tobacco or illicit drugs. Although there has been a significant decline in tobacco and illicit drug use among teens, underage drinking has remained at consistently high levels.
- Young people who start drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to have alcohol problems later in life than those who begin drinking at age 21 or older.
- New research indicates that alcohol may harm the developing adolescent brain.
- There are approximately 11 million underage drinkers in the United States. Nearly 7.2 million (18.8 percent) are considered binge drinkers and more than 2 million (6 percent) are classified as heavy drinkers. By age 18, more than 70 percent of teens have had a drink.
- As they get older, the chance that young people will use alcohol grows. Over 11 percent of 12-year-old children (6th graders) say that they have used alcohol at least once. By age 13, that number doubles. By age 14 (8th grade), 41 percent of children have had at least one drink, and nearly 20 percent say they have been drunk at least once.



Who is the *Call to Action* for?

The *Call to Action* calls upon every member of society to recognize the severity of the underage drinking problem in the United States and work to prevent and reduce alcohol use by children and adolescents to protect them from the negative effects of underage drinking.

What is in the *Call to Action*?

- The *Call to Action* is organized into four sections that provide a public health approach to prevent and reduce underage drinking:
 - Section 1 provides an overview of the scope of the underage drinking problem in the United States.
 - Section 2 describes alcohol use and its relationship to and impact on adolescent development.
 - Section 3 describes the framework for prevention and reduction of alcohol use and alcohol disorders in adolescents
 - Section 4 delineates strategies for action that can lead to improved interaction, communication, and cooperation to prevent and reduce underage drinking.

Six Goals of the *Call to Action*

Developed in collaboration with the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* identifies six goals for the nation to reduce the number of underage drinkers and prevent children and adolescents from beginning to drink.

- GOAL 1:** Foster changes in American society that facilitate healthy adolescent development and that help prevent and reduce underage drinking.
- GOAL 2:** Engage parents, schools, communities, all levels of government, all social systems that interface with youth, and youth themselves, in a coordinated national effort to prevent and reduce drinking and its consequences.
- GOAL3:** Promote an understanding of underage alcohol consumption in the context of human development and maturation that takes into account individual adolescent characteristics as well as environmental, ethnic, cultural, and gender differences.
- GOAL 4:** Conduct additional research on adolescent alcohol use and its relationship to development.
- GOAL 5:** Work to improve public health surveillance on underage drinking and on population-based risk factors for this behavior.
- GOAL 6:** Work to ensure that policies at all levels are consistent with the national goal of preventing and reducing underage alcohol consumption.

Suggested Citation:

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Copies of *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* and other related materials are available at www.surgeongeneral.gov or by calling the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-729-6686.