

# Dealing with Binge Drinking - Improving Safety for Teens



**A**lcohol use is common among teens. For many teens accessing alcohol, binge drinking and intoxication is considered a rite of passage. Alcohol intoxication is associated with acute health risks including accidents, coma and unprotected sex as well as longer term risks such as poor school performance or alcoholism. Recent research from British Columbia on binge drinking reveals important newly identified risks as well as opportunities to improve safety and intervention.

The McCreary Centre surveyed over 29,000 grades 7-12 students across British Columbia on the health status and risk behaviors.

McCreary Survey: Students who ever drank alcohol (other than a few sips)

AGE	2003	2008
13 - year olds	34%	29%
15 - year olds	64%	58%
17 - year olds	79%	78%

Almost half of teens who drank alcohol (44%) also reported binge drinking in the last month. Binge drinking means having 5 or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours. Binge drinking is very common amongst adolescents in BC.

Another study at British Columbia Children's Hospital (BCCH) in 2006 of teens investigated teens who were brought to the Emergency Department for treatment of life threatening alcohol intoxication. This study revealed some of the medical and social issues associated with binge drinking behaviors.

### This study found:

- ▶ Every weekend, on average 2 teens between 10-17 years old were brought into the emergency department by ambulance.
- ▶ The average age of teens brought in with life endangering intoxication was 14 years old.
- ▶ There were more girls than boys.
- ▶ Hard liquor such as whisky, gin, vodka and tequila, rather than wine, coolers or beer were most frequently consumed (see graph).
- ▶ One third used marijuana and alcohol together.

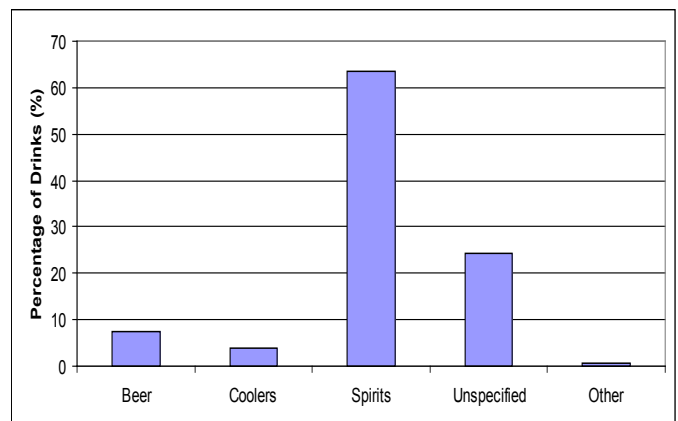


Figure 1: Distribution of alcoholic beverages reported by youths who presented to BCCH Pediatric Emergency Department for alcohol intoxication in 2006.

*continued...*

## Important Study Findings:

### ***Intoxicated teens are often abandoned by their peers.***

Most of the intoxicated adolescents were brought to the Emergency Department by ambulance. When the ambulance arrived at the scene, a third of the adolescents were alone outside in a vulnerable state. They were picked up in common public locations such as beaches, parks, back alleys, sidewalks, sky-train stations and bus stops. Often their peers called 911 and then abandoned them.

***An Emergency visit for intoxication is a distressing and frightening experience for teens and their families:*** Most adolescents stayed in the Emergency for 7 hours. While nearly all were cold and had an altered level of consciousness, a third were comatose requiring emergency management. Many were aggressive towards medical staff while intoxicated and 15% had to be physically restrained.

### ***Psychologically vulnerable teens are at higher risk for an Emergency Department visit***

Four had previously attempted suicide. Over a third of the adolescents had previously documented psychological diagnoses. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) was the most common diagnosis.

Adolescents who presented more than once to the Emergency for intoxication were even more vulnerable. Seventy percent had a mental health diagnosis.

## IMPORTANT MESSAGES FOR TEENS:

▶ Know the risk of hard liquor

### ▶ **Be safe:**

*When drinking in a group and someone passes out*

- ▶ Call a responsible adult
- ▶ Consider calling 911
- ▶ Stay with the person
- ▶ Lie them on their side and keep them warm
- ▶ Give the receiving adult an accurate history

## IMPORTANT MESSAGES FOR ADULTS:

***Acknowledge and praise rather than punish teens that help their peers by calling for help and staying with them***

- ▶ Youth who have problems with binge drinking are psychologically vulnerable and they would benefit from follow up with a health care professional.

**For more information contact:**

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