



UNDERAGE DRINKING

FACT SHEET

The Adolescent Brain & Alcohol

The American Medical Association released a report on the effects of alcohol on the brains of adolescents. The study compared magnetic resonance imaging of the brains of 14- to 21-year-olds who abused alcohol with those of non-drinkers. That study found that drinkers had about 10% **smaller** hippocampi – the area of the brain that handles memory and learning. Researchers call such a reduction significant and possibly irreversible.¹

"Our brains go through important transformations during adolescence," says Sandra Brown, Ph.D., chief of psychology services at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in San Diego. "This study shows that alcohol use during the adolescent years is associated with damage to memory and learning capabilities as well as to the decision-making and reasoning areas in the brain."

According to Brown, alcohol takes a greater toll on brain development of those under twenty-one than on any other age group. Findings indicate that adults would have to consume twice as many drinks to suffer the same damage as adolescents and that **even occasional heavy drinking injures young brains.**

According to the American Medical Association Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse:

- On average, children now try alcohol for the first time at the age of 12;
- Nearly 20% of 12- to 20-year-olds report being binge drinkers (4-5 drinks in a row);
- Alcohol is a factor in nearly half of all teen automobile crashes, the leading cause of death among this group.

Public Opinion

In a recent public opinion survey funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that...

- 96% of Americans are concerned about underage drinking
- 83% of Americans support laws that penalize adults who illegally supply alcohol to minors
- 70% of Americans favor a ban on TV liquor ads
- 59% of Americans support banning beer commercials on TV

Underage Drinking in Pennsylvania

According to the 2007 Pennsylvania Youth Survey² (PAYS) of 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade public school students (conducted every two years)...

- 44.8% of Pennsylvania 12-graders admitted to using alcohol in the past 30 days, while 78.4% admit to having consumed alcohol at some time in their life
- 3.3% of Pennsylvania 6-graders admitted to using alcohol in the past 30 days, while 23.9% admit to having consumed alcohol at some time in their life
- For those participating in the survey, alcohol use far outweighed the use of all other drugs, including, cigarettes, marijuana, and cocaine.

¹The American Medical Association Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse study, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Harmful Consequences of Alcohol Use on the Brains of Children, Adolescents, and College Students.*

²2007 Pennsylvania Youth Survey, conducted by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency in collaboration with the Department of Education, Department of Health, Liquor Control Board, and Department of Public Welfare. The PCCD contracted with Westat, a private research company, to conduct the survey.

