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NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

CDC Report: Binge Drinking Among Women and High School Girls — United States, 2011

Excessive alcohol use among women and girls accounted for an estimated average of 23,000 deaths and 63,000 years of potential life lost (YPLL) in the United States each year during 2001–2005.

A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that binge drinking was responsible for more than half of those deaths and YPLL. Binge drinking is a risk factor for many health and social problems that affect women, including unintentional injuries, violence, liver disease, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, breast and other cancers, reduced cognitive function, and alcohol dependence.

Binge drinking also can affect women's reproductive health by increasing the risk for acquiring human immunodeficiency virus and other sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, miscarriage, and low birth weight. A woman who binge drinks might unintentionally expose a developing fetus to high blood alcohol concentrations, increasing the risk for sudden infant death syndrome, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. At the state level, binge drinking by women correlates strongly with binge drinking by high school girls.

Reducing the prevalence of binge drinking among adults and youths is a leading health indicator in Healthy People 2020. To assess measures of binge drinking nationwide among women and girls, CDC analyzed data from the 2011 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) to determine the prevalence, frequency, and intensity of binge drinking among adult women, and data from the 2011 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to determine measures of current alcohol use and binge drinking among high school girls.

The results in this report indicate that in 2011, binge drinking was common among U.S. adult women, and women who binge drank tended to do so frequently (average of three times per month) and intensively (average of six drinks on occasion), placing themselves and others at a greater risk for alcohol-attributable harms. The prevalence of binge drinking was similar among high school girls (especially in grades 11 and 12), women aged 18–24 years, and women aged 25–34 years. Binge drinking was most prevalent among women living in households with annual

incomes of $75,000 or more.

At the state level, alcohol consumption by high school girls is strongly correlated with alcohol consumption by adult women. This probably reflects the influence of adult drinking behavior on youths, including the fact that youths often obtain alcohol from adults and that youths often aspire to behave like young adults.

The drinking behavior of youths and adults also is affected by the price and availability of alcoholic beverages and religious and cultural factors. Additionally, binge drinking, unlike other leading risk behaviors, has not been subjected to intense prevention efforts. Underage girls are overexposed to alcohol marketing relative to women to an even greater extent than underage boys are overexposed to alcohol marketing relative to men, thereby increasing the risk that girls will initiate alcohol consumption and consume more alcohol when they drink . New alcoholic beverages also have been developed and marketed (e.g., flavored malt beverages) that are known to appeal to underage girls.

Although binge drinking is more prevalent among men, women who binge drink are at high risk for alcohol-attributable harms, in part because they differ from men in their physiologic response to alcohol consumption. Women tend to reach higher blood alcohol levels than men at the same consumption level, even after taking into account differences in body size, food consumption, and other factors.

In addition, binge drinking increases the risk for unintended pregnancy, and women with unintended pregnancies tend to have delayed pregnancy recognition, increasing the risk for alcohol-exposed pregnancy and adverse reproductive health outcomes, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, among women who binge drink, and further emphasizing the need to prevent binge drinking in women.

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