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Fallout of College Students' Binge-Drinking

About 44 percent of U.S. college students binge-drink, many of them racking up big bills at their local hospitals, a new study has found.

Released this week, the study, by Marlon P. Mundt and Larissa I. Zakletskaia at the University of Wisconsin, was supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. It's to appear in the April issue of the journal Health Affairs.

At universities with at least 40,000 students, total expenses stemming from blackout-related visits to emergency departments run $469,000 to $546,000 a year, the study projects.

The study relies in large part on interviews with 954 high-risk drinkers at five North American universities, according to a news release. Those who suffered six or more alcohol-induced blackouts in the past year "were 70 percent more likely to be treated at the emergency department than students who consumed the same amount of alcohol but did not experience blackouts," the release reads. The study authors wrote: "College alcohol abusers susceptible to blackouts put a heavy burden on the medical-care system. Given limited campus resources, the study results support targeting efforts at preventing alcohol-related injury at students with a history of blackouts. ... In our cost estimate, close to a half-million dollars could be saved in emergency-department utilization costs on a large university campus each year if interventions targeting blackout sufferers were successful."

Penn State has long tried to reduce binge-drinking trends in State College, in part through a campus-community partnership. The State Patty's Day drinking holiday last month saw a variety of town-grown efforts intended to offer alternatives to drinking. Alcohol-related visits to the local emergency department that weekend declined slightly.

To learn more about Alcohol and Alcoholism, please click here.