More than a quarter of the American population who are too young to drink are doing so anyway according to a new report issued today by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Although there has been progress in reducing the extent of underage drinking in recent years, particularly among those aged 17 and younger, the rates of underage drinking are still unacceptably high. Not only did 26.6 percent of 12-20 year-olds report drinking in the month before they were surveyed, 8.7 percent of them purchased their own alcohol the last time they drank. The study used combined data from SAMHSA's 2008 to 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

"Underage drinking should not be a normal part of growing up. It's a serious and persistent public health problem that puts our young people and our communities in danger," said SAMHSA Administrator Pamela S. Hyde. "Even though drinking is often glamorized, the truth is that underage drinking can lead to poor academic performance, sexual assault, injury, and even death."

All 50 states and the District of Columbia currently have laws prohibiting the purchase and use of alcoholic beverages by anyone under age 21.

Broken out by state, the NSDUH Report shows that the rates of underage drinking in the past month were highest in Vermont (37.0 percent) and lowest in Utah (14.3 percent). Vermont was one of six states in the northeast among the top ten states with the highest rates of past month underage alcohol use, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Rhode Island. New York also had one of the highest rates (15.0 percent) of past month underage self-purchase of alcohol.

States with the lowest incidence of underage youth illegally purchasing their own alcohol included New Mexico (2.5 percent), Idaho (2.6 percent), and Oregon (2.6 percent). Southern states had some of the lowest rates of underage drinking (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia) and some of the highest rates of underage youth illegally purchasing their own alcohol (Alabama, Louisiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, and North Carolina).

To view the full NSDUH report "State Estimates of Underage Alcohol Use and Self-Purchase of Alcohol: 2008 to 2010," click here.

Source: http://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/advisories/1211193154.aspx

There is no single age group of people more affected by alcohol and drugs than young people. In some ways it feels like it is an issue everywhere: for you, your family and your friends. Plain and simple, try as you might, you cannot escape the issues of alcohol and drugs. To learn more, click here.