

Facts and Recommendations for Individuals and Families

FACING ADDICTION IN AMERICA

The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health

How do we define substance use problems?

Substance misuse is the use of any substance in a manner, situation, amount, or frequency that can cause harm to users or to those around them. Prolonged, repeated misuse of a substance can lead to a **substance use disorder**, a medical illness that impairs health and function. Severe and chronic substance use disorders are commonly referred to as **addictions**.

Why should we be concerned about these problems?

Alcohol and drug misuse is a pervasive and increasing problem throughout the United States.

- Over 66 million people (25% of all people) reported binge drinking. Binge drinking is defined as having 5 or more standard drinks for men and 4 or more standard drinks for women on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.¹
- Nearly 48 million people (18% of all people) said they used an illicit drug or misused prescription drugs in the past year.¹
- Illicit drug use and its consequences are increasing. More than 47,000 people died from a drug overdose in 2014,² and nearly 30,000 of these deaths involved prescription drugs.³
- Alcohol misuse contributes to 88,000 deaths in the United States each year.⁴



Youth and young adults are especially at risk.

- The majority of people with a substance use disorder started using substances during adolescence.
- Using alcohol or drugs during adolescence or young adulthood affects brain development which is not complete until about a person's mid-twenties.
- About three quarters (74 percent) of 18- to 30-year-olds admitted to substance use disorder treatment programs began using substances at the age of 17 or younger.⁵

¹ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ), 2016.

² Rudd et al, 2016.

³ National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2015

⁴ Stahre et al., 2014.

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and CBHSQ, 2014



1 in 7 people

will develop a substance use disorder at some point in their lives.

Source: Kessler et al., 2005.

What types of problems result from misusing alcohol and drugs?

Consequences of alcohol and drug misuse that affect individuals and families include:

- Compromised physical and mental health, including heart and liver diseases, various forms of cancer, suicide attempts and fatalities, and overdose deaths;
- Increased spread of infectious disease, such as Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDs;
- Increased health care costs;
- Loss of productivity at school and work;
- Reduced quality of life; and
- Increased crime and violence, motor vehicle crashes, and child abuse and neglect.

How can we reduce substance misuse and substance use disorders?



What can you do?

- 1** *Parents, talk to your children about alcohol and drugs.* Become informed about substances your children may encounter and the risks they face. Talking openly to your children is crucial.
- 2** *Reach out, if you think you or someone you know has a problem.* Talk to family members, friends, or a health care professional. The earlier treatment begins, the better the outcomes are likely to be.
- 3** *Be supportive (not judgmental) if a loved one has a problem.* Recognize that a substance use disorder is a medical condition, not a moral failing. Be supportive and compassionate.
- 4** *Show support towards people in recovery.* Acknowledge and celebrate their achievements. Encourage them to maintain their recovery program and supports.
- 5** *Advocate for the changes needed in your community.* Address substance misuse and substance use disorders with a public health approach. Everyone can play an important role in advocating for their needs, the needs of their loved ones, and the needs of their community.

How can you find out more?

The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health provides evidence-based information on effective and sustainable strategies for addressing alcohol and drug problems. The Report offers hope, practical solutions, and resources for individuals and families, who play a critical role in prevention, treatment, and recovery for those affected by substance use disorders and their consequences. To read the Report, visit <http://Addiction.SurgeonGeneral.gov>.

