



## Fact Sheets

# Age 21 Minimum Legal Drinking Age

<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/mlda.htm>

## Public Health Problem

- Excessive alcohol consumption contributes to more than 4,600 deaths among underage youth, that is, persons less than 21 years of age, in the United States each year.<sup>1</sup>
- Underage drinking is strongly associated with many health and social problems among youth including alcohol-impaired driving, physical fighting, poor school performance, sexual activity, and smoking.<sup>2</sup>
- Most underage youth who drink do so to the point of intoxication, that is, they binge drink (defined as having five or more drinks in a row), typically on multiple occasions.<sup>2</sup>
- Current drinking during the previous month among persons aged 18 to 20 years declined significantly from 59% in 1985 to 40% in 1991, coincident with states' adopting an age 21 minimum legal drinking age, but increased to 47% by 1999.<sup>3</sup>
- The prevalence of current drinking among persons aged 21 to 25 also declined significantly from 70% in 1985 to 56% in 1991, but increased to 60% by 1999.<sup>3</sup>

## Relationship between Youth and Adult Drinking

- Binge drinking by adults is a strong predictor of binge drinking by college students living in the same state.<sup>4</sup>
- There are approximately 1.5 billion episodes of binge drinking among persons aged 18 years or older in the United States annually, most of which involve adults age 26 years and older.<sup>5</sup>
- More than half of all active duty military personnel report binge drinking in the past month, and young adult service members exposed to combat are at significantly greater risk of binge drinking than older service members.<sup>6</sup>
- More than 90% of adult binge drinkers are not alcohol dependent.<sup>7</sup>

## Prevention of Underage Drinking

- The Task Force on Community Preventive Services recommends implementing and maintaining an age 21 minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) based on strong evidence of effectiveness,

including a median 16% decline in motor vehicle crashes among underage youth in states that increased the legal drinking age to 21 years.<sup>8</sup>

- The Task Force on Community Preventive Services also recommends enhanced enforcement of laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol to minors to reduce such sales.<sup>9</sup>
- Age 21 MLDA laws result in lower levels of alcohol consumption among young adults age 21 years and older as well as those less than age 21 years.<sup>10</sup>
- States with more stringent alcohol control policies tend to have lower adult and college binge drinking rates.<sup>4</sup>
- In addition to the age 21 MLDA, other effective strategies for preventing underage drinking include increasing alcohol excise taxes<sup>11</sup> and limiting alcohol outlet density<sup>9</sup>. Youth exposure to alcohol marketing should also be reduced.<sup>11</sup>

## References

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