



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Binge Drinking is Dangerous

Binge Drinking Among Adults — 14 States, 2004

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[Announcer] *This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.*

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Whether it's a beer at the ball game or a cocktail at a party, consumption of alcohol is a common practice in the United States. But for some people, drinking to extreme is proving deadly. A recent CDC study found that binge drinking is common among U.S. adults, and is responsible for about 44,000 deaths per year.

Dr. Pollyanna Chavez is an EIS officer with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the growing problem of binge drinking. Welcome to the show, Pollyanna.

[Dr. Chavez] Thank you, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Pollyanna, tell us, exactly how do you define binge drinking?

[Dr. Chavez] Binge drinking is defined as consuming five or more drinks per occasion if you're a man or four or more drinks on an occasion if you're a woman.

[Dr. Gaynes] Why do people participate in this activity?

[Dr. Chavez] Most people are led to believe that binge drinking is part of having fun. The social environment regarding drinking in the United States is generally permissive of drinking to get drunk or at least gives drinkers mixed messages about the appropriateness of drinking to the point of intoxication. Also, alcohol is relatively inexpensive, it's relatively available, and it's heavily advertised.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is binge drinking more common among any particular gender, age, or racial group?

[Dr. Chavez] We have found that binge drinking is more common among whites, males, people age 18-34 years, and surprisingly, those making fifty thousand dollars or more annually. And we say surprisingly because the existing awareness about the risk associated with other factors like smoking and obesity is missing when we consider the risk associated with binge drinking. So, one reason why binge drinking is more prevalent among people at higher income levels might be because, unlike smoking, binge drinking has not been widely recognized as a health risk, has not been subjected to intense prevention efforts, and is not socially stigmatized.

[Dr. Gaynes] Do all binge drinkers suffer from alcoholism?

[Dr. Chavez] No. Most binge drinkers are not alcohol dependent because they don't need alcohol for their daily functions.

[Dr. Gaynes] Does binge drinking lead to other health problems?

[Dr. Chavez] Binge drinking can lead to alcohol poisoning, and it has also been linked to other medical issues, such as high blood pressure, heart attacks, sexually transmitted diseases, and for pregnant women, fetal alcohol syndrome. It has also been linked to other harmful social outcomes, such as suicides, violence, motor vehicle crashes, and unintended pregnancies.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some strategies to overcome this growing problem?

[Dr. Chavez] Part of our strategy is to increase awareness that binge drinking is a problem, not only for the individual, but also for society. So, to prevent binge drinking, our recommendations are: increasing taxes on alcohol products; limiting the number of retail outlets, like bars, liquor stores, where alcohol is sold in a particular geographic area; and maintaining and enforcing age 21 as the minimum age for legal drinking.

[Dr. Gaynes] Pollyanna, where can listeners get more information about binge drinking?

[Dr. Chavez] Listeners can go to our website at www.cdc.gov/alcohol.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Pollyanna. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Pollyanna Chavez about the growing problem of binge drinking.

Remember, consuming excessive amounts of alcohol on a single occasion can lead to alcohol poisoning and a host of dangerous or even fatal health problems. So be smart and don't binge drink.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.