

# Children and young people factsheet



## **Our drinking culture is putting our children and their future at risk.**

### **Alcohol can have an immediate impact on our children's health.**

#### The facts:

- The North East has the highest rate of under 18 hospital admissions in England.
- Teenagers drink twice as much as they did in 1990.
- Evidence has shown that alcohol seriously impairs brain development in young people.
- Around a third of young suicide victims have drunk alcohol before their death.
- Between 2002 and 2009, 92,220 children and young people aged under 18 were admitted to hospital in England for alcohol related conditions - that's an average of 36 children or young people a day
- There was a 57% increase in alcohol related deaths amongst young people aged 15-34 between 1991 and 2006.
- In the North East, approximately 660 under-18s were treated for alcohol dependency in 2009/10, around 320 of whom were under 16.

### **Alcohol can have an immediate impact on our children's safety by making them vulnerable to their own poor decisions and the bad intentions of others.**

#### The facts:

- 40% of 13-year-olds and 58% of 15-year-olds who have drunk alcohol have experienced negative consequences including smoking, taking drugs and unprotected sex.
- Parental alcohol misuse has been identified as a factor in over 50% of child protection cases.
- More than 100 children, including children as young as five, contact ChildLine every week with worries about their parent's drinking or drug use.
- More than seven in ten North Easterners associate alcohol consumption with family breakdown.
- More than seven in ten North Easterners associate alcohol consumption with a negative impact on child safety.

### **Our children are learning that drinking to excess is normal, creating the next generation of problem drinkers.**

#### The facts:

- In the North East there has been a 403% increase in the number of 30-34 year olds being admitted into the region's hospitals with alcohol related liver disease between 2002 and 2010.
- More than a quarter of parents in the North East have been drunk in front of their children.
- Home is largely where young people learn to drink and there has been a worrying increase, with 40% of North East adults doing most of their drinking at home.
- A Life Education survey found that almost a third of children think that for adults who drink wine, five or more glasses a night is normal drinking behavior.

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- Buying alcohol for underage teenagers to take to parties or allowing them to drink at home can increase the risk of problems later in life.
- A person who begins drinking as a young teen is four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than someone who waits until adulthood to use alcohol.

## Drinking habits

It is worth highlighting that overall, the proportion of young people who do not drink is increasing. However a large percent still do – putting themselves and their futures at risk. Latest figures show that:

- 45% of pupils say that they have drunk alcohol at least once.
- In 2009, 51% of pupils said they have drunk alcohol, down from 61% in 2003.
- In 2010, 13% of pupils had drunk alcohol in the last week, similar proportions of boys and girls. As with all drinking, this continues a decline from 26% in 2001, and is significantly lower than in 2009, when 18% of pupils reported drinking in the last week.
- Pupils who drank last week, drank an average amount of 12.9 units in a week.

However, too many young people are drinking too much alcohol:

- The North East is the region with the highest number of Year 10 pupils consuming seven or more units of alcohol in the last seven days.
- The UK's figure for underage drunkenness is 33% (measured in terms of the proportion of 13-15-year-olds who have been drunk at least twice). This is more than double the rate for countries such as the United States, France and Italy. Among girls, the gap between the UK and other countries is even wider.

## What and where do young people drink?

There is evidence that young people increasingly favour higher strength alcoholic drink. Research shows they drink at home or at the homes of friends or unsupervised in open air public places. It also reveals that consumption is linked to affordability as teenagers with a weekly income of £30 a week are twice as likely as those with £10 a week to drink frequently and in public places.

## Parental influence

Parents are the biggest influence on a child's life. Their attitudes and behaviour shape the attitudes and behaviours of the next generation. Fortunately, the majority of North East parents appear to be doing a good job when it comes to alcohol. According to research:

- Seven in ten adults say it's not OK to provide children 15 and under with alcohol.
- Almost eight in ten say it's not acceptable for a young person 13-15 to drink alcohol.
- A third of parents have never given alcohol to their children aged 16-17.
- More than eight in ten have never bought alcohol for their child aged 10-17.
- Almost seven in ten have never been drunk in front of their child.
- Girls aged over 11 were asked why adults drank until they lost control and vomited. Several responded by saying that it was part of a good night out.

However, home is largely where young people learn to drink and there has been a worrying increase, with 40% of North East adults doing most of their drinking at home. This is clearly having an influence. A Life Education survey found that almost a third of children think that for adults who drink wine, five or more glasses a night is normal drinking behavior.

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The impact of parental drinking is also impacting on children and young people's immediate safety:

- Up to 2.6m children in the UK live with a hazardous drinker.
- 40% of child protection cases and 74% of child mistreatment cases in the UK.
- A report in 2010 by ChildWise into the impact of adult drinking on children found that nearly a third feel scared when they see adults drunk or drinking too much.

## Peer pressure

Young people frequently overestimate the prevalence of alcohol use amongst peers and the approval of their friends around drinking. This perception plays a role in determining young people's own attitudes and behaviours:

- In one South Tyneside school 8 out of 10 pupils don't drink every weekend.
- In one South Tyneside school 7 out of 10 pupils had never had a standard drink of alcohol.

## Young people and advertising

Young people are thought to be particularly susceptible to advertising. Research shows that just under half of North Easterners believe that alcohol advertising targets children and two thirds support a watershed ban – this would mean alcohol could not be advertised on TV before 9pm.

- The alcohol industry spends £800m a year on marketing – which leads young people to start drinking earlier and to consume more.
- Millions of children, some as young as four-years-old, were exposed to alcohol adverts during last year's World Cup.
- Movie exposure and having a television in the bedroom are both independent predictors of onset of problematic alcohol use.

## The impact of alcohol on children and young people

Alcohol misuse is directly linked to anti-social behaviour, violence, accidents, physical and mental health problems and poor school performance. A study in the North West suggests 40% of young people who drank outside in public had experienced alcohol fuelled violence.

It also encourages risk taking behaviour, poor decision making and ultimately increased vulnerability.

- Young people aged 18-24 who binge drink are far more likely to admit to criminal or disorderly behaviour during or after drinking (63%) than other regular drinkers of the same age group.
- The UK has one of the highest percentages of 15-16 year olds who have engaged in unprotected sex as a result of alcohol use.
- The rate of liver cirrhosis amongst young adults has increased in the last 10 years and this is likely to be associated with drinking in the teenage years.
- 40% of 13-14 year olds were drunk or stoned the first time they had sex.

## Suggested guidelines

For adolescents going through a period of rapid growth and physical change, risk free drinking does not exist. Research shows that there is no amount of alcohol that can be

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considered safe and that young people under the age of 18 should not drink to get drunk. The former Chief Medical Officer recommended that:

- Children should enjoy an alcohol free childhood up until at least the age of 15.
- Alcohol use during teenage years is related to a wide range of health and social problems.
- If people aged between 15 and 17 consume alcohol it should be supervised, occur no more than once a week and should not exceed the recommended daily limit.

In America, the Surgeon General has made it clear that no one should drink alcohol until they are at least 21-years-old.