Drug Use/Abuse & Driving Among Teens

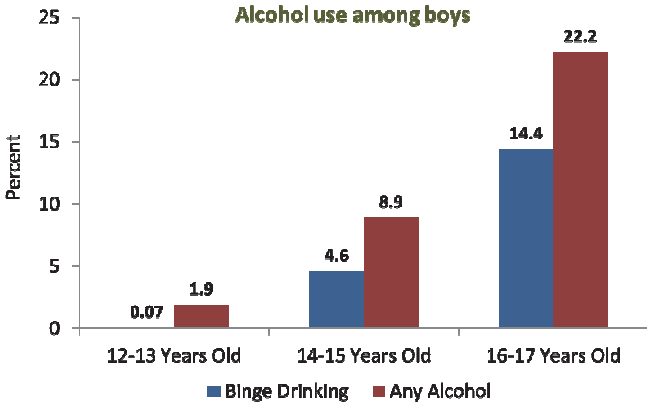
When it comes to making choices in life, some are better than others. Knowing the choices teens are making in regards to alcohol and drugs can impact their safety while driving. Vehicle crashes are the #1 killer of our youth.

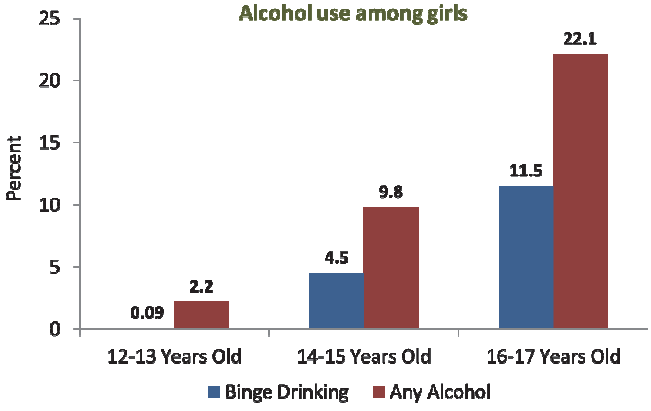
Alcohol

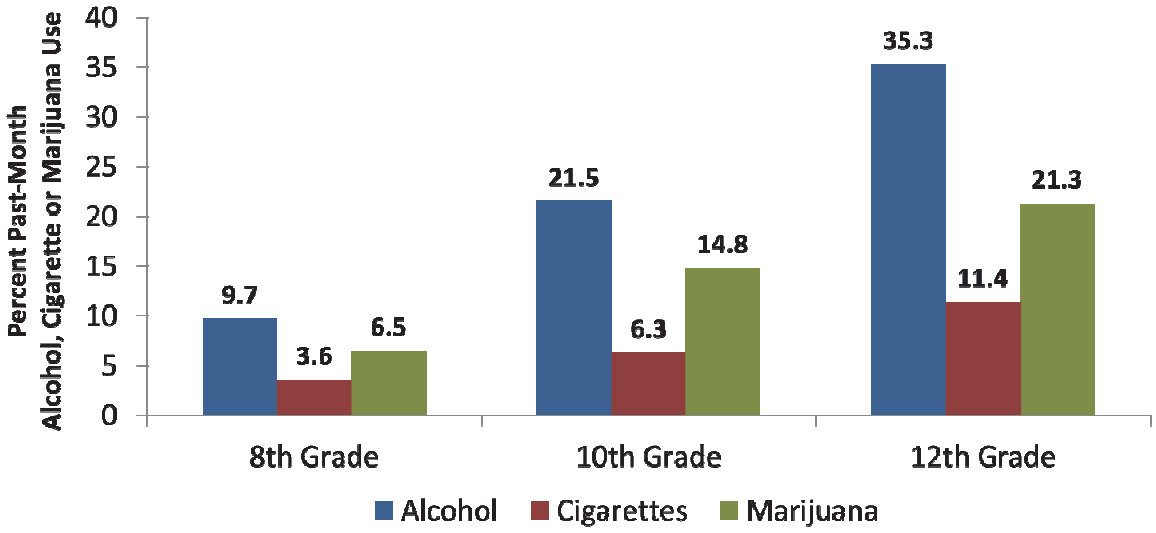
People ages 12 through 20 drink 11 percent of all alcohol consumed in the United States. Although youth drink less often than adults do, when they do drink, they drink more. That is because young people consume more than 90 percent of their alcohol by binge drinking.

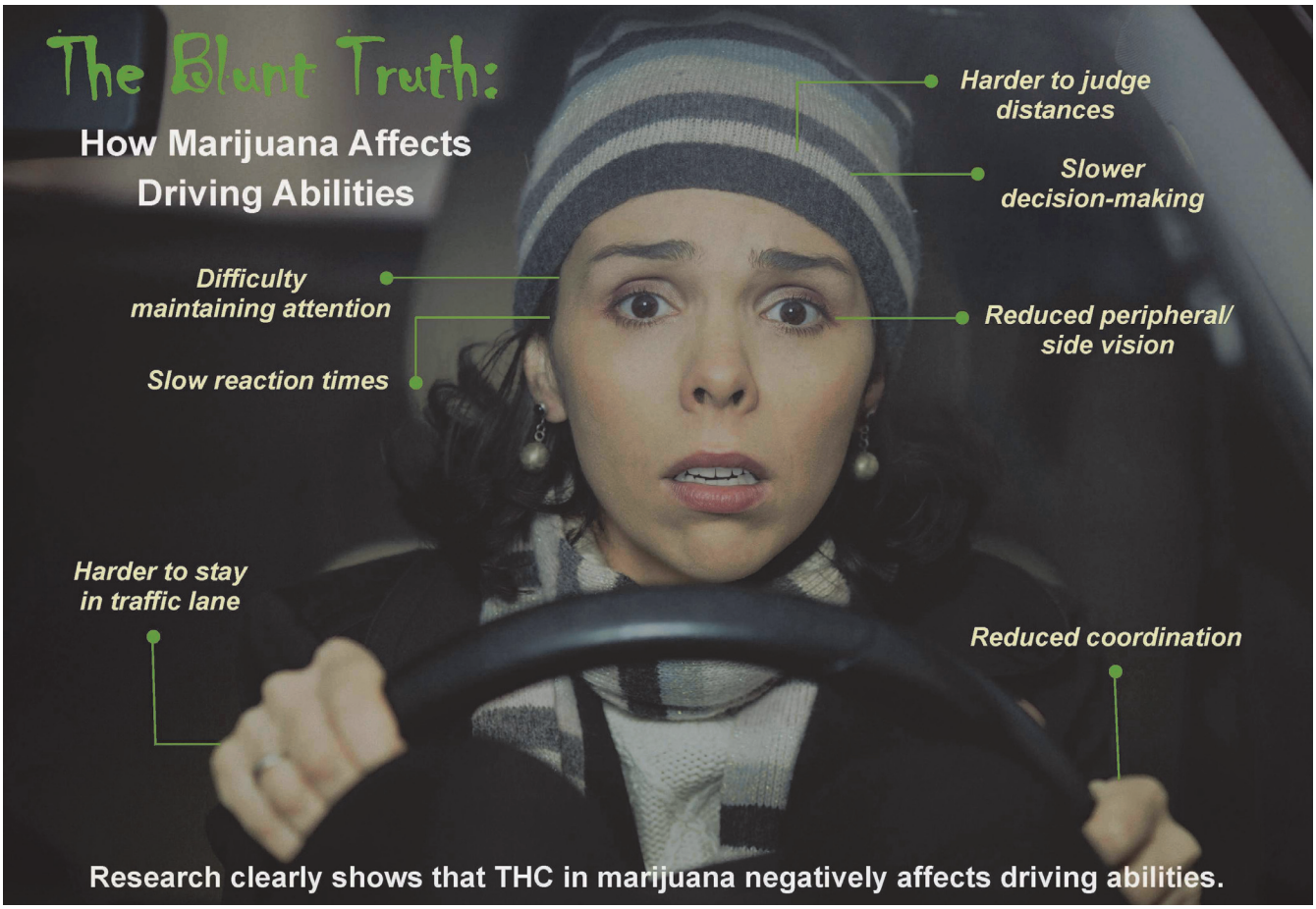
Underage drinking poses a range of risks and negative consequences. It is dangerous because it causes many deaths and injuries, impairs judgment which can lead to poor decisions about engaging in risky behavior, including drinking and driving, sexual activity (such as unprotected sex), and aggressive or violent behavior.

Research shows that young people's brains keep developing well into their 20s. Alcohol and drugs (illegal and legal) can alter this development, potentially affecting both brain structure and function. This may cause cognitive or learning problems and/or make the brain more prone to addiction.



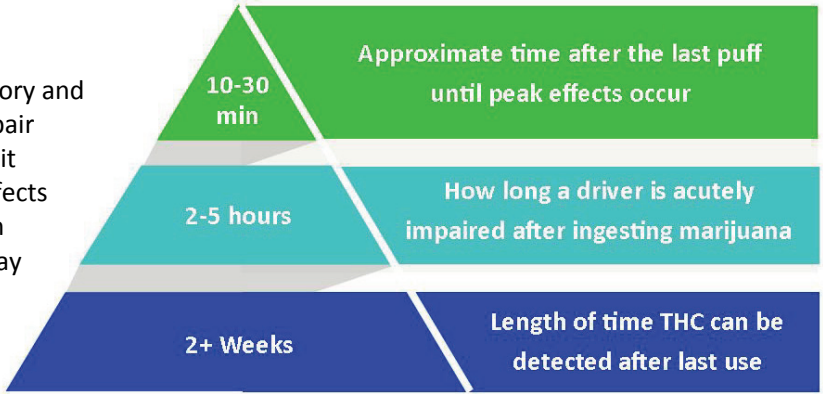






Marijuana

Because marijuana impairs short-term memory and judgment and distorts perception, it can impair performance in school or at work and make it dangerous to drive an automobile. It also affects brain systems that are still maturing through young adulthood, so regular use by teens may have a negative and long-lasting effect on their cognitive development, putting them at a competitive disadvantage and possibly interfering with their well-being in other ways.



Also, contrary to popular belief, marijuana can be addictive, and its use during adolescence may make other forms of drug abuse or addiction more likely. Thus, a reason some refer to marijuana as a gateway.

How marijuana is consumed? There are four main methods of ingesting marijuana: inhalation, oral, sublingual, and topical.

- There are two ways to inhale marijuana, smoking and vaporizing. The effect is almost instantaneous.
- Marijuana can also be ingested orally. This can be in the form of edibles, tinctures, capsules or oils. The onset for oral ingestion is slower and the effects are stronger and last longer than with inhalation.
- Marijuana can also enter the blood stream when placed under the tongue and held in the mouth. Common examples of these type of products include dissolvable strips, sublingual sprays, or medicated lozenges or tinctures.
- A final way to consume marijuana is through topical applications. These come in the form of lotions, salves, bath salts and oils that are applied to the skin.

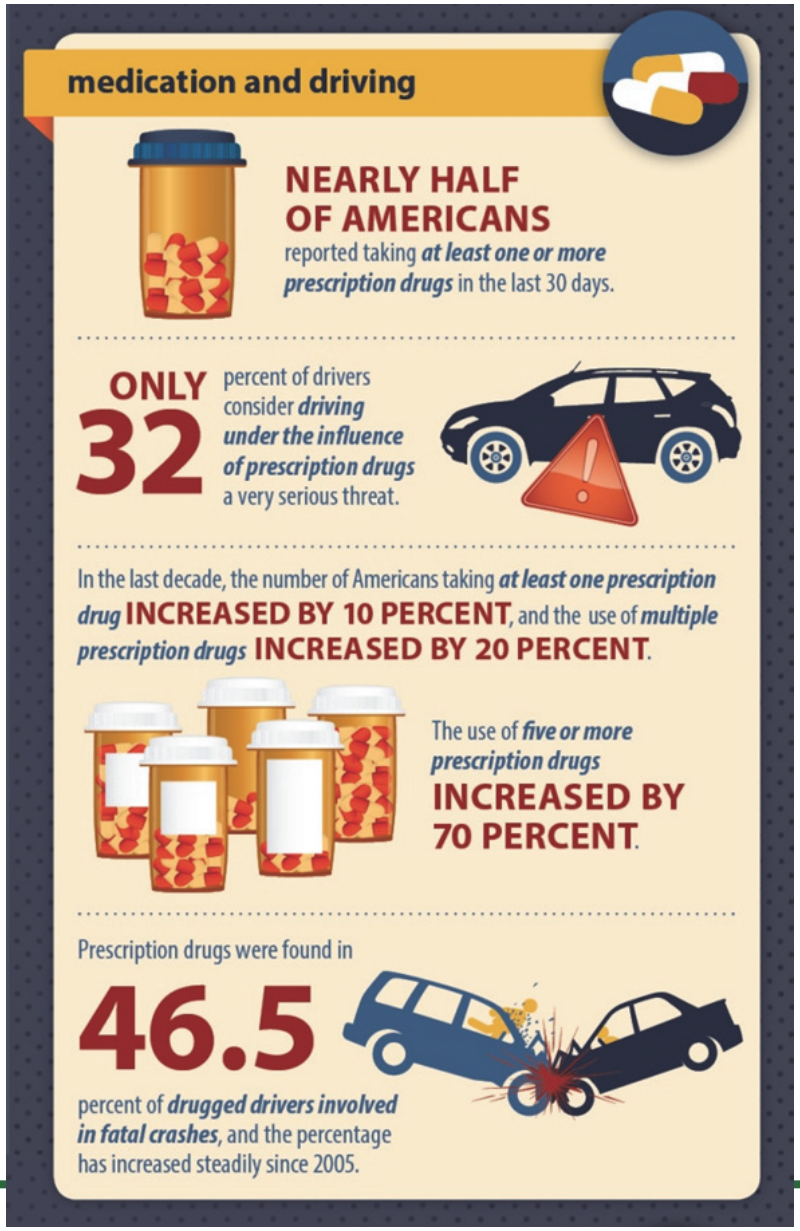
Over the Counter/Prescription Meds

The classes of prescription drugs most commonly abused are: opioid pain relievers, such as Vicodin® or Oxycontin®; stimulants for treating Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), such as Adderall®, Concerta®, or Ritalin®; and central nervous system (CNS) depressants for relieving anxiety, such as Valium® or Xanax® The most commonly abused OTC drugs are cough and cold remedies containing dextromethorphan.

Prescription and OTC drugs may be abused in one or more of the following ways:

- Taking a medication that has been prescribed for somebody else.
- Taking a drug in a higher quantity or in another manner than prescribed.
- Taking a drug for another purpose than prescribed.

More people die from overdoses of prescription opioids than from all other drugs combined, including heroin and cocaine.



Prevalence of Past-year Drug Use Among 12th Graders	Prevalence
Alcohol	58.2
Marijuana/Hashish	34.9
Hookah	19.8
Small cigars	15.9
Amphetamines*	7.7
Adderall®*	7.5
Snus	5.8
Narcotics o/t Heroin*	5.4
Synthetic Cannabinoids	5.2
Tranquilizers*	4.7
Cough Medicine*	4.6
Vicodin®*	4.4
Hallucinogens	4.2
OxyContin®*	3.7
Sedatives*	3.6
MDMA (Ecstasy)	3.6
LSD	2.9
Hallucinogens o/t LSD	2.9
Cocaine (any form)	2.5
Ritalin®*	2.0
Inhalants	1.9
Salvia	1.9

** Nonmedical use*

Categories not mutually exclusive

Warning Signs of Underage Drinking/Drug Use

Adolescence is a time of change and growth, including behavior changes. These changes usually are a normal part of growing up but sometimes can point to an alcohol or drug problem. Parents and teachers should pay close attention to the following warning signs:

- Changes in mood, including anger and irritability
- Academic and/or behavioral problems in school
- Rebelliousness
- Changing groups of friends
- Low energy level
- Less interest in activities and/or care in appearance
- Problems concentrating and/or remembering
- Coordination problems

The Role Parents Play

Parents and teachers can play a big role in shaping young people's attitudes toward alcohol and drugs. Parents in particular can have either a positive or negative influence.

Parents can help their children avoid alcohol and drug problems by:

- Talking about the dangers of using drugs and alcohol
- Serving as positive role models when engaging with impairing substances
- Not making alcohol or drugs available (including prescription medications)
- Disposing of expired or unneeded prescriptions through drug take-back programs conducted by law enforcement agencies or pharmacies, instead of flushing down toilet or tossing in the garbage
- Getting to know their children's friends
- Connecting with other parents about sending clear messages about the importance of not drinking alcohol or using drugs
- Supervising all parties to make sure there is no alcohol or drugs

Make it a night to remember.
AAA PROMISE
not to drink and drive.

Free Prevention Program

AAA PROMise was introduced to help protect teens and other motorists from prom through graduation season. Designed to cater to the unique needs of parents, high school officials and law enforcement, AAA PROMise asks teens to make a mature decision to not drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs or get in the car with someone whose sobriety is in question. It also reinforces the parent-teen relationship by fostering a predetermined agreement and creating a solid defense against intoxicated driving.

For more information on the AAA PROMise program, visit www.AAA.com/PROMise.

Sources:

National Institute of Health
National Institute on Drug Abuse
Drug Policy Alliance
AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

The Auto Club Group

Auto Club Group Traffic Safety FOUNDATION

Juvenile Officers Association Minnesota 1955 MNJOA

Minnesota State Patrol