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UNDERAGE DRINKING GOES UP DURING THE HOLIDAYS Risk of Death and Injury in Alcohol-Related Incidents Also Increases

Alcohol is likely to be present at many holiday parties and celebrations. And as adults celebrate with family and friends, young people will be celebrating right along with them.

The presence of alcohol during the holidays often results in minors having easy access to alcohol as well. Statistics show that one third of 6th and 9th graders get alcohol from their own homes; and many teens cite other people's homes as the most common setting for youth consumption of alcohol.

It is against the law for young people to drink, yet almost 10 percent of the nation's 113 million drinkers are underage. Any person who sells or provides an alcoholic beverage to a minor can receive a fine up to \$1,000 and up to 32 hours of community service.

"Nothing good can come from giving alcohol to a minor," said Connie Moreno-Peraza, Deputy Director for San Diego County Alcohol and Drug Services. "Giving alcohol to a minor can lead to criminal sanctions or worse, the loss of a loved one."

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 20. Underage drinking also leads to increased rates of suicide, sexual assaults, and high-risk sex.

"The holidays should be a happy occasion," added Moreno-Peraza. "Unfortunately, sometimes those happy occasions end up in tragedy because some people choose to act irresponsibly."

The risk for traffic incidents and deaths go up dramatically during the holidays due to an increase in alcohol consumption.

According to the California Office of Traffic Safety, there were 110 alcohol-related fatalities in San Diego County in 2004, as well as 3,180 injuries. Of the total alcohol-involved deaths, 21 occurred during the months of December and January; the majority of those during the holiday period.

"Driving under the influence is no accident," stated Moreno-Peraza. "These deaths can be prevented. Our families and communities should not have to suffer the devastating consequences."

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