

Alcohol Awareness Month keys on the most popular and deadliest drug of abuse

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Drinking alcohol leads to two hospital visits every minute.
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Coinciding with warmer spring days, baseball season and upcoming prom and graduation celebrations, April is recognized as *Alcohol Awareness Month*. Founded by the National Council on *Alcoholism* and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD) since 1987, the observance aims to increase public awareness and understanding to reduce the stigma associated with alcohol use disorders – stigma that too often prevents individuals and families from seeking help. The 88,000 alcohol-related deaths in the United States every year are 100 percent preventable.

More than 21 million Americans suffer from alcohol-use disorders, such as the disease of alcoholism. The NCADD notes it isn't just those with the disease who suffer. "In addition, there are countless millions of individuals, family members and children who experience the devastating effects of the alcohol problem of someone in their life. In fact, 25 percent of U.S. children have been exposed to alcohol-use disorders in their family. The recovery book *Every Silver Lining Has a Cloud* estimates that every alcoholic directly impacts the lives of a minimum of eight other people.

The economic cost of alcoholism and alcohol abuse has recently been estimated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to be \$223.5 billion (\$746 per person) or about \$1.90 per drink. Researchers found the costs largely resulted from losses in workplace productivity, health care expenses and law enforcement or other criminal justice expenses related to excessive alcohol consumption. Only six percent of the estimate is attributed to motor vehicle crash costs from impaired driving.

"Mixing alcohol with gasoline while drinking and driving kills more than 10,000 per year, which is a year-over-year increase for the first time in years, but up to 75 percent of other crimes are committed by people under the influence of alcohol," notes *Every Silver Lining Has a Cloud*. "And two hospital visits every minute are alcohol-related. It's pressing the health care system to a breaking point."

Alcoholism places an enormous emotional, physical and financial burden on family members and children of the person who is addicted to alcohol. NCADD research states, "Three of four domestic abuse incidents are committed while one or both members are intoxicated and family members utilize health care twice as much as families without alcohol problems. Emotional and physical abuse often occurs as a result of parents or spouses losing control with family members because of alcohol.

Teens that experiment with alcohol before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent when they are older than those that wait until age 20. Which is why education and prevention are co critically important to reducing alcohol-related problems and alcoholism.

"Unfortunately, still too many of our children are drinking alcohol, at too early an age," according to the NCADD. "Much of it goes unnoticed and unchecked by adults. Unconcerned or unaware of the health risks, lacking in other coping skills, and eager to find peer acceptance, many teens are involved in regular alcohol use, which puts them at greater risk for alcoholism, as well as related problems like drunk driving, sexual assault and other violence, and further drug use."

Parents can help to reduce their child's risk of problem drinking by educating their kids and keeping a more watchful eye on them, especially as they enter middle schools. "We know that high levels of parental monitoring are associated with lower levels of both high school and eventually college drinking. Research has linked parents' disapproval of underage drinking to a lower risk of alcohol use, and that increased parent-child hostility has been tied to a greater likelihood of problem drinking," says the NCADD. *Every Silver Lining Has a Cloud* states "waiting for the high-school years for alcohol-related health and safety messages – and parents leading by example – is way too late. They've already stepped out onto the street, the truck just hasn't hit them yet."

For the 27th Anniversary of NCADD Alcohol Awareness Month, NCADD has chosen the theme, 'Help for Today. Hope For Tomorrow.'

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