

# Health & Legal Consequences of Underage Drinking

Underage alcohol consumption is the number one substance problem facing Arizona youth. Kids in our state are trying alcohol for the first time and drinking on a regular basis before age 13, according to a 2006 youth survey.

Governor Janet Napolitano and the Arizona Underage Drinking Prevention Committee are raising awareness about the problem: that underage drinking is not a “rite of passage” and that alcohol harms a young person’s developing brain. The following are health consequences all adults should know so our kids continue to live healthy lives.

## HEALTH HARMS

- Underage drinking raises the likelihood of other substance abuse and alcohol addiction. Underage drinkers are 22 times more likely to use marijuana, 50 times more likely to use cocaine, and five times more likely to become alcoholics. (*SAMHSA, 2006*)
- The brain’s frontal-lobe development and refinement of neuro-pathways continues until age 16, and the brain matures until age 20. Damage from underage drinking can be irreversible. Even short-term or moderate drinking impairs learning and memory far more in youth than adults. (*American Medical Association, 2003*)
- Adolescent drinkers scored worse than non-drinkers on vocabulary and memory retrieval. Verbal and nonverbal recall showed a 10 percent decrease among underage alcohol users. (*American Medical Association, 2003*)
- Drinking alcohol during puberty may upset the critical hormonal balance needed for normal development of organs, muscles, bones, and the reproductive system. (*National Institute of Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism, Alcohol Alert, 2006*)
- Alcohol tricks the brain's pleasure-reward system by stimulating production of dopamine, thus creating unnatural feelings of pleasure from a chemical instead of real experiences. Because teen brains produce an abundance of dopamine compared to adults, they can rapidly go from liking, to craving, to needing alcohol, which can initiate a path toward alcoholism. (*Journal of Substance Abuse, 1997*)
- 40 percent of kids who start drinking before age 15 will become alcoholics at some point in their lives. (*National Research Council, "Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility," 2003*)
- Youth are at greater risk of alcohol poisoning because their brains have not fully developed an internal "cut-off" switch that causes adults to fall sleep or pass out after consuming too much. Alcohol poisoning can cause difficulty breathing, unconsciousness and death. (*Parentsempowered.org*)

Many parents believe kids “will drink anyway” and they have little control over underage alcohol use or access to it. Some parents feel pressure to allow their kids to go to adult-supervised drinking parties. Truth is, adults have more influence than they think. Adults don’t have to host alcohol parties for kids, and they shouldn’t. It’s against the law.

## **LEGAL HARMS**

### **For those under age 21 (ARS 4-241)**

- It’s illegal to have ANY alcohol in your body if you’re under age 21.
- It’s a class 3 misdemeanor if you are under age 21 and solicit another person to purchase, sell, give, serve or furnish you with alcohol.
- It’s unlawful to drive or be in physical control of a motor vehicle or motorized watercraft if you’re under age 21 and there is ANY alcohol in your body.
- Using fake IDs when under age 21 in order to be sold, served, given, or furnished alcohol, or gain entrance into a licensed establishment is a class 1 misdemeanor.
- Possessing alcoholic beverages can result in misdemeanor charges and a heavy fine for anyone under 21.

Penalties may include:

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| 1. Juvenile court hearing                    | 4. Required counseling or education programs |
| 2. Driving privileges suspended for 180 days | 5. Community service or probation            |
| 3. \$500 fine                                |  |

*A judge can impose any combination of the above.*

### **For adults of legal drinking age (ARS 4-241 and 4-244)**

- It’s illegal to give or sell alcohol to someone under age 21. Penalties include a maximum fine of \$2,500 plus 80 percent surcharge, and a maximum jail sentence of 6 months.
- Adults and parents who knowingly misrepresent the age of minors so they may be served liquor before turning 21 are guilty of a class 1 misdemeanor. A judge may suspend the adult’s driver’s license for 30 days on a first conviction and for six months the next time.
- It’s a class 1 misdemeanor for adults to knowingly serve alcohol to non-family guests whom they “know or should know” are under age 21. You may be liable in civil litigation if those minors are injured in a related accident—in or out of a car.
- It’s unlawful for an employee to accept gratuity or compensation of any kind for:
  - allowing someone under age 21 to enter an establishment
  - selling or giving alcohol to someone under age 21
- It’s illegal for retail employees to sell alcohol to a person of any age if that person intends to resell the liquor to someone over or under age 21.