

PREVENTING ALCOHOL-RELATED INJURIES

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Excessive alcohol consumption contributes to more than 100,000 deaths each year in the United States.
- Nearly half of alcohol-related deaths result from motor-vehicle crashes, falls, fires, drowning, homicides, and suicides.
- An alcohol-related motor vehicle crash kills someone every 30 minutes and injures someone every 2 minutes.
- Nearly two-thirds of children ages 14 years and younger killed in alcohol-related crashes are riding with the drinking driver.
- Each year about 120 million episodes of alcohol-impaired driving occur in the United States.
- Between 20% and 30% of patients seen in U.S. hospital emergency departments (ED) have alcohol problems.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

Funding from CDC facilitates work on several fronts to combat alcohol-impaired driving, the single most important cause of alcohol-related injuries. CDC conducts basic surveillance to assess the extent of the problem and the risk factors associated with alcohol and also evaluates the effectiveness of existing interventions in preventing alcohol-impaired driving. CDC monitors U.S. injury trends, including surveillance of impaired driving; develops and tests interventions to reduce alcohol-related injuries; and funds state health departments to implement and evaluate community-based programs to prevent motor vehicle-related injuries and death. Through these efforts, CDC can determine not only what works, but also which promising programs and policies should be emphasized. CDC works in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and others to coordinate efforts targeted to improve and promote alcohol-impaired driving prevention policies and programs nationwide.

Previous research has provided insight into the effect of alcohol on injuries. For example, CDC researchers analyzed data about child passenger fatalities in alcohol-related crashes. Their findings revealed that, of the more than 5,500 children ages 14 years and younger who were killed in an alcohol-related crash between 1985 and 1996, nearly two-thirds (64%) were riding in the same vehicle as the drinking driver. On the basis of these findings, Mothers Against Drunk Driving formed an expert panel to study the issue of impaired driving with child passengers as “child endangerment,” and to assess what could be done about it.

Example of Program in Action

CDC and the Center for Rural Emergency Medicine at West Virginia University are conducting a clinical trial to determine the efficacy of screening ED patients for alcohol problems and counseling those who screen positive. Almost 44% of the nearly 3,000 patients who have been screened had alcohol problems. More than 1,200 have been randomized to standard treatment and counseling arms of the study, and over 95% of the patients assigned to the counseling group were willing to accept counseling.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will evaluate strategies to implement and disseminate known, effective interventions that reduce alcohol-impaired driving, and CDC will continue to test the effectiveness of new, innovative strategies.