



Alcohol Poisoning

Although parents sometimes don't like to acknowledge it, today's high school students—and even kids as young as middle school—are drinking. Unfortunately, many are drinking at levels that can lead to alcohol poisoning. Before your kids head off to the first party or gathering of friends this school year, talk with them about the real dangers of binge drinking and dispel the myth about the safety of “sleeping it off.” Knowing the signs and symptoms of alcohol poisoning, and knowing how to intervene if a friend needs help, can save a life.

NYC-Parents in Action gratefully acknowledges Phoenix House for providing this information. The IMPACT Program at Phoenix House has been serving NYC for more than 25 years, helping teens whose experience with alcohol and other drugs has negatively affected their school work and relationships with family and friends. Trained clinical staff are available to provide assessment and intervention services to teens showing signs of a struggle with alcohol or drugs. To learn more or to get help, visit www.phoenixhouse.org/impact.

What Is Alcohol Poisoning?

Alcohol poisoning is a serious and sometimes fatal result of binge drinking. It happens when the alcohol content in your blood rises to a level that your body cannot break down. It is not the result of drinking bad or old alcohol but rather too much alcohol. If you drink too much alcohol in too short a time period, you can overdose before you even pass out or lose consciousness (this is because the brain hasn't yet caught up with the damage already happening in the body). Trying to sober up with coffee or water won't help.

Many times friends witness a friend in alcohol overdose and know there is something wrong. This may happen to you but you may feel uncomfortable calling for help because you are afraid that you might get into trouble with the police or your parents—or even your friends. Don't worry about getting in trouble; making the call could save a life. Showing that you can take responsibility to help a friend should earn you respect not punishment.

Warning Signs of a Person with Alcohol Poisoning:

- Mental confusion, semi-conscious, or cannot be woken up (by shaking etc.)

- Slow breathing: fewer than 8 breaths per minute; or Irregular breathing: 10 seconds or more between breaths.
- Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, paleness.

What To Do If You Think Someone Has Alcohol Poisoning:

- Call 911. Don't worry about getting in trouble or making friends angry, the call could save a life.
- Don't leave your friend alone. Even if he or she appears to be “sleeping it off,” remember that alcohol already in the stomach will continue to enter the bloodstream and your friend will continue to get drunk even after he or she has stopped drinking. A person who has passed out could die.
- Turn them on their side so they don't choke on their vomit.
- If you're not sure if your friend is acutely intoxicated, call a health professional immediately—don't wait for all the symptoms or try to guess the level of drunkenness.

Information provided by Phoenix House