

## [Awareness Month Highlights the Risks of Alcohol Abuse](#)

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More than a quarter of youth aged 12-20 (27.6 percent) drank alcohol in the past month, according to a survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In New Jersey, an estimated 27.8% to 29.2% of persons aged 12 to 20 drank alcohol in the past month.

Despite efforts to limit access, underage drinkers are often able to illegally purchase alcohol themselves. In fact, the SAMHSA survey also revealed that nationwide, approximately 8.6 percent of past-month drinkers aged 12-20 purchased their own alcohol the last time they drank. "Reducing access to alcohol is critical to the prevention of underage consumption," said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHA), which represents 150 nonprofit addiction treatment and mental health provider organizations in every community of New Jersey. "We all must take steps to keep alcohol out of the hands of children, but parents must also be vigilant in monitoring their children and should establish an open dialogue with them to discuss the dangers associated with underage drinking."

Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth. Alcohol contributes to the three leading causes of death among 12-20-year-olds (unintentional injury, homicide and suicide). Research indicates that those who start drinking before age 15 are six times more likely to have alcohol problems as adults than those who start drinking at age 21 or older. In recognition of the serious problem of alcohol abuse, April is designated "Alcohol Awareness Month" across the nation.

"In addition to illustrating the prevalence of alcohol abuse among young individuals across the nation and in New Jersey, this data clearly indicates the importance of access to treatment for alcohol and other substance abuse disorders," stated Dr. Wentz. "We should all be alert to the

signs of alcohol abuse and be aware of available resources in case we believe a friend or a loved one is at risk."

If the answer is "yes" to any of the following questions, an individual may have a problem with alcohol:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won't?
- Do you ever forget what you did while drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hangover after drinking?

A report from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), a division of the National Institutes of Health, estimates that the cost of alcohol abuse across the country to be \$186 billion, with the costs found in treatment services, medical consequences, lost earnings, criminal justice costs and other factors.

"While the economic costs of alcohol abuse are indeed great, the emotional costs and the impact on friends and families are just as severe," noted Dr. Wentz. "Families and friends of individuals with an alcohol addiction can be affected in several ways: Loss of trust and respect for the person can weaken or destroy relationships; loss of financial security can occur either directly because of the addiction or from a resulting loss of employment; children are often neglected or abused as behavior becomes more out of control; and other domestic violence can occur."

Treatment for alcohol and other substance abuse disorders is available and has been proven effective.. To identify and contact local providers, call NJAMHA at between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. during normal business days or click on "Need Treatment" on the left-hand sidebar on our website.

SAMHSA's research findings are available online at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k10/180/SR180UADhtml.pdf>