Holiday Drinking

By Barbara Byers, 4-H Prevention Program Director

The Holiday season is once again upon us with all the time spent with family and friends—and a larger chance of increased alcohol and drug use. And an increase in the possibility of a holiday tragedy. Alcohol is involved in at least 50% of all deadly holiday crashes according to the Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Parties that include alcoholic beverages make it easier for youth to have access to alcohol and drinks lying around may prove to be too big a temptation to resist. Or a favorite adult may offer your child a sip or even drinks too much in front of him/her. These possibilities make it even more important for families to make the effort to keep their children safe.

Here are some Holiday Celebration Tips from the Parent Resource Center:

- Let your child know what you expect. Tell your child that adults may be drinking during the holidays but under no circumstances is he/she allowed to drink.
- At your holiday gatherings, offer plenty of non-alcoholic foods, drinks, activities
- To lower the risk of alcohol poisoning, be sure to throw out partly empty alcoholic drinks. Children love to imitate adults, and if they have access to leftover drinks, they may taste the contents
- Have a plane in place about what you and your family will do if you are at a party where there are people who have had too much to drink
- Model responsible behavior by making sure that guests who have had too much to drink do not drink and drive
- If your older child is going to a holiday event, call ahead to make sure that there will be no alcohol free
- Let your child help you make some non-alcoholic drinks such as non-alcoholic cider, eggnog or punch.

What can I do?

- Talk to your child about your expectations; set rules and follow them.
- Remember your children are watching you at parties—limit your drinks
- Don’t buy alcohol for kids—it’s NOT safer for them
- Enforce curfews
- Get together with parents who think like you and make sure alcohol isn’t available at their house or events
- Don’t wait to talk to your child if you think he/she is drinking

So Who is Drinking?

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2002, the average age is 15.7 years old while SAMSHA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) reported in 2003 that in the past 30 days, 48% of high school seniors had consumed alcohol.

How do they get alcohol?

- Parents or other adults
- Ask someone older to purchase it for them
- Buy it with a fake ID

Teenagers feel alcohol is very easy to obtain—even though it is illegal for them to do so.

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink is one that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol:

- 12 oz. of beer or wine cooler
- 8-9 oz. of malt liquor
- 5 oz of table wine
- 3-4 oz of fortified wine
- 1-5 oz. of brandy
- 1/5 oz. of spirits
- 2-3 oz of cordial, liqueur or aperitif

Source: NIAAA, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIH Publication No. 07-3769, revised January 2009