

Our Futures – Year 8

Alcohol: Lesson 1

Alcohol and the Law

- The legal drinking age in Australia is 18.
- It is generally illegal to sell or supply alcohol to a person under the age of 18 (minor).

However, in all Australian states and territories, in premises which are not licensed or restricted (e.g. at home):

- **A parent or guardian** can supply alcohol to their own child (minor), or
- **A responsible adult authorised by a parent or guardian** can supply alcohol to that child (minor).
- In most Australian states and territories, **it is illegal for minors to possess or consume any alcohol in a public place, however, this rule does not apply in NSW, SA and QLD if minors are under the supervision of a responsible adult.**
- If the public place is an alcohol-free zone or an alcohol-prohibited area, it is still illegal for a minor to possess or consume alcohol, even if they are under the supervision of a responsible adult.
- If a minor is in possession of alcohol in a public place and is not under the supervision of a responsible adult, the police can seize the alcohol.
- A responsible adult is defined as:
 - A parent, step-parent or guardian of the minor.
 - The minor's spouse or any person who, although not legally married to the minor, ordinarily lives with the minor as the minor's spouse on a permanent and domestic basis.
 - A person who is, for the time being, in loco parentis to the minor.

NHMRC 2020 Guidelines

- The Australian Alcohol Guidelines are based on the "Australian standard drink".
- A "standard drink" is a measure of the quantity of alcohol contained in an alcoholic beverage. In Australia, one standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol.

Adults

For healthy adults, to **minimise the risk of alcohol-related harm over a lifetime**,

the Australian Alcohol Guidelines recommend to drink:

- No more than 10 standard drinks a **week**

To **minimise the risk of injury on a single occasion of drinking**, the Australian Alcohol Guidelines recommend to drink:

- No more than 4 standard drinks on a single occasion

Young people

For young people (up to 18 years) the Australian Alcohol Guidelines recommend that the safest option is to not drink at all. If drinking does occur, it should be at a low-risk level and in a safe environment, supervised by adults.

How do you know how many standard drinks are contained in an alcoholic beverage?

The labels on alcoholic drink bottles and cans state the number of standard drinks they contain. This is required under Australian labelling laws.

Standard drinks charts provide a summary of the approximate number of standard drinks in different alcoholic beverage categories.

For example:

A can of full strength beer contains 1.4 standard drinks

A can (375ml) of full strength premixed spirits contains 1.5 standard drinks

A bottle (330ml) of full strength premixed spirits contains 1.2 standard drinks

A full standard drinks chart can be accessed in the module resources.

What sort of acute harms do young people experience from alcohol?

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (2019) found that 12.1% of young people (1 in 8), aged 14-17 years, had experienced an alcohol-related incident during the previous year. Approximately 1 in 12 (8.2%) of those incidents involved verbal abuse and 1 in 37 (2.7%) involved physical abuse. When looking at all Australians aged over 14 years, these figures increase substantially, with approximately 1 in 5 (17.7%) reporting they had been a victim of alcohol-related verbal abuse and 1 in 20 (4.8%) reporting they had been physically abused by someone under the influence of alcohol.

Alcohol and driving:

The Australian Medical Association reported that alcohol is a greater factor than speed, fatigue, weather, or road conditions in fatal road crashes. A report produced by the World Health Organisation found that in Australia, 17% of fatal road crashes involved alcohol. In Australia, the maximum blood alcohol concentration (BAC) permitted for a full drivers licence holder is 0.05 while driving, whilst **learner and provisional drivers are required to have a BAC of zero**.

Alcohol-related hospitalisation & fatalities

The National Alcohol Indicators Project found that an estimated 5,785 Australians aged 15 years and over died from alcohol-attributable disease and injury in a single year. The last national record of alcohol-attributable hospital admissions found 144,000 in a single year, averaging to about 400 per day. **Alcohol-**

related emergency department presentations are highest among teenagers (15-19 year olds), compared with other age cohorts.

In an average week, 5 Australians aged 15-24 years die due to alcohol-related causes. Alcohol contributes to the three leading causes of adolescent death: unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide.

The likelihood of injury and risk-taking behaviours increases when adolescents use alcohol. A recent study (Hingson & Zha, 2018) investigating drinking alcohol and other health-risk behaviours among secondary school students in years 9-12 found that compared to non-drinkers, students who binge drank were more likely to report:

- Greater illicit drug and tobacco use
- More risky sexual and traffic behaviours (e.g. drive after drinking or ride with drinking drivers, not wear seatbelts or bike helmets)
- More physical fights
- Increased suicide attempt injuries
- Less school-night sleep
- Poorer school grades

Useful Resources

This reference list is provided as a good source of information for parents who may be interested in reading further.

For information about Australian alcohol laws:

Australian Government Department of Health. (2020). Alcohol laws in Australia.

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/about-alcohol/alcohol-laws-in-australia>

For general information about alcohol and young people:

Alcohol and Drug Foundation. (2018). Alcohol and young people.

https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/ADF_AOD_YoungPeople.pdf

National Drug & Research Centre. Alcohol and young people.

https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/NDA073%20Fact%20Sheet%20Alcohol%20and%20Young%20People_0.pdf

For information and statistics on alcohol use in Australia:

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report.

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illicit-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019/contents/table-of-contents>

For general information about alcohol tailored to Parents/Teachers:

Positive Choices. Alcohol: Detailed Resource (for Parents/Teachers).

<https://positivechoices.org.au/documents/ArhqqWfklz/alcohol-detailed-resource-for-parentsteachers/>

For information about Australian drinking guidelines:

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2020). Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. Commonwealth of Australia.

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/file/15923/download?token=t0Hrxdvq>

For information about alcohol-related harms and deaths:

National Alcohol Indicators Project Bulletin No. 14 Trends in estimated alcohol-related emergency department presentations in Australia 2005-06 to 2011-12. National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, WA.

<https://ndri.curtin.edu.au/NDRI/media/documents/naip/naip014.pdf>

National Alcohol Indicators Project Bulletin No. 16 Estimated alcohol-attributable deaths and hospitalisations in Australia, 2004 to 2015. National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, WA.

<https://ndri.curtin.edu.au/ndri/media/documents/naip/naip016.pdf>

Hingson, R.W and Zha, W. (2018) Binge Drinking Above and Below Twice the Adolescent Thresholds and Health Risk-Behaviours. *Alcoholism* 42(5): 904-913.

For information about drink driving laws and fatal road crashes:

World Health Organization. (2018). Global Status Report on Road Safety 2018.

<https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1164010/retrieve>

For information about the National Alcohol Strategy to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm:

Australian Government Department of Health. (2020). National Alcohol Strategy 2019 – 2028.

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-alcohol-strategy-2019-2028>