

Mayo Clinic: Hospitalization of US underage drinkers common, costs \$755 million a year

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Hospitalization for underage drinking is common in the United States, and it comes with a price tag -- the estimated total cost for these hospitalizations is about \$755 million per year, a Mayo Clinic study has found. Researchers also found geographic and demographic differences in the incidence of alcohol-related hospital admissions. The findings were published online today in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Of the roughly 40,000 youth ages 15 to 20 hospitalized in 2008, the most recent data available, 79 percent were drunk when they arrived at the [hospital](#), researchers say. [Alcohol abuse](#) and addiction and drinking-related [emotional problems](#) were among the diagnoses.

Among all U.S. teens, roughly 18 of every 10,000 adolescent males and 12 of every 10,000 females were hospitalized after consuming alcohol in the year studied. In all, 700,000 young people in that age group were hospitalized for various reasons, including non-alcohol-related conditions, in 2008.

"When teenagers drink, they tend to drink excessively, leading to many destructive consequences including [motor vehicle accidents](#), injuries, [homicides](#) and suicides," says researcher Terry Schneekloth, M.D., a Mayo Clinic addiction expert and psychiatrist.

Underage drinking is common in the United States: 36 percent of high-school students report having consumed alcohol at least once, although the prevalence of heavy drinking (more than five drinks in a row within

the preceding two weeks) is lower (7 percent).

"Alcohol use necessitating acute-care hospitalization represents one of the most serious consequences of underage drinking," Dr. Schneekloth says. "Harmful alcohol use in adolescence is a harbinger of alcohol abuse in adulthood."

The average age of those with alcohol-related discharges was 18; 61 percent were male. Nearly a quarter of the alcohol-use disorder hospitalizations included an injury, most commonly [traffic accidents](#), assaults and altercations.

The analysis used the most recent (2008) Nationwide Inpatient Sample data, the largest all-payer inpatient care database in the United States. It is approximately a 20 percent stratified sample of all U.S. hospitals, accounting for about 90 percent of all discharges in the United States. To calculate the incidence rate of hospitalizations, researchers took population denominator data from the U.S. Census Bureau for 2008.

For adolescent males and females, hospitalization incidence was highest in the Northeast and Midwest, lowest in the South, and intermediate in the West. On multivariable analysis, older age and male gender were associated with alcohol-use disorder hospitalizations. In general, black Americans had lower hospitalization rates than whites, and Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders had the lowest rates. The rates tended to be highest for Native and other/mixed-race Americans; however, the number of hospitalizations was relatively small, making estimates imprecise. The findings may help target substance abuse prevention efforts toward geographic and demographic groups at greatest risk.

Much of the hospitalization cost (\$505 million) involved treatment of injuries. A total of 107 of those hospitalized died (.27 percent): Their age was 18.6 years, and 82 percent were male. Seventy-three percent of

the deaths occurred during a hospitalization for injuries.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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