

Excessive drinking costs U.S. colleges millions annually

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Price tag for ER visits can top \$500,000 for larger universities, study finds.

(HealthDay) -- The emergency room costs of treating college students with injuries associated with alcohol-induced blackouts can be more than half a million dollars a year at a university with 40,000 or more students, a new study found.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison study included 954 [college students](#) who were [heavy drinkers](#). In the 28 days before the start of the study, male participants drank an average of 81.8 drinks and female participants drank an average of 58.7 drinks.

In the year before the study, 52 percent of males and 50 percent of females had experienced an alcohol-induced [blackout](#).

During the two-year study, 30 percent of males and 27 percent of females reported visiting an emergency department at least once. Their injuries ranged from [broken bones](#) to head and brain injuries.

Students who experienced frequent alcohol-related blackouts (six or more in the prior year) were 70 percent more likely to be treated at an emergency department than those who consumed the same amount of alcohol but did not experience blackouts.

The cost of emergency-department visits by students who experienced blackouts ranged from \$469,000 to \$546,000 per university, depending on its location.

"College alcohol abusers susceptible to blackouts put a heavy burden on the medical care system," concluded study authors Marlon Mundt and Larissa Zakletskaia, of the department of [family medicine](#) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"Given limited campus resources, the study results support targeting efforts at preventing alcohol-related injury [among] students with a history of blackouts," the researchers said. "In our cost estimate, close to a half-million dollars could be saved in emergency-department utilization costs on a large university campus each year if interventions targeting blackout sufferers were successful."

About 44 percent of college students [binge drink](#), according to the study.

The study appears online and in the April print issue of *Health Affairs*.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has more about [college drinking](#).

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