

Many teens knowingly ride with drunk drivers, survey finds

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Peer pressure isn't the only reason why, experts say.

(HealthDay)—Many U.S. teenagers have willingly accepted a ride from a drunk driver within the past year, a new survey reveals.

Nearly one in three teens surveyed—30 percent—said during the previous 12 months they had accepted a ride from someone who'd been drinking alcohol.

Further, one in four said they'd be willing to ride with a driver who has been drinking, according to results from a survey sponsored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving and State Farm Insurance.

"Everyone would agree that riding with a drinking driver is not a good idea, but teens are making this choice to do so," said Dave Phillips, a State Farm spokesman. "This study shows that teens don't plan to ride

with a drinking driver, but they are willing to do so if the situation comes up."

But the online poll of 600 people ages 15 to 20 turned up some encouraging news, too.

More than 90 percent of teenagers said they'd be willing to talk with friends about the risks of riding with a drunk driver, either in advance or when faced with the situation.

Also, 70 percent feel that speaking up against riding with a drunk driver wouldn't harm their friendships with other kids.

"We need to encourage youth to talk to their peers about the dangers of [underage drinking](#) and riding with a drinking driver," Phillips said.

MADD National President Colleen Sheehey-Church said the poll results were released to coincide with a key part of the school year.

"October is a time when teens across the country are settling into the new school year and enjoying school dances and sporting events and fall festivities," increasing the chances that they'll be confronted with a drunk driver, she said.

Sheehey-Church's own son died in a crash while riding with a drunk driver.

"At 18 years old, my son Dustin made that choice to get into a car with an underage drunk and drugged driver," she said. "That driver lost control of the vehicle going at a high rate of speed and went over a cliff and crashed into a river."

Although he was sober and wearing his seat belt, Dustin died from

drowning.

In 2013, Sheehey-Church said, 378 kids ages 15 to 20 were killed as passengers of a drinking driver, and 53 percent of deaths were a result of riding with an underage drunk driver.

Parents need to prepare their kids on ways to handle this predicament, said Robert Turrisi, a professor of biobehavioral health with Penn State's Prevention Research Center.

"Young people are not just small versions of adults," said Turrisi, who has researched what motivates kids to ride with [drunk drivers](#). "They really think fundamentally different. They make their decisions more based upon emotions than well-thought-out plans, most of the time."

Parents need to have ongoing conversations with teens about what they'd do if offered a ride by a drunk, Turrisi said. These conversations need to be detailed—asking what other options a kid might take or how they'd talk with their friends about not getting into the car.

Parents should keep in mind that reasons for driving with a drinker might extend beyond [peer pressure](#). For example, a girl might not want to leave her female friend alone with a group of boys who've been drinking, Turrisi said. Or a teen might not want to spend money on a taxi.

The fact that nearly all kids are willing to talk about not riding with a drunk driver, and that most aren't worried about damaging their friendships, shows there's an opportunity for peer pressure to work in a beneficial way, he said.

"Sometimes one strong voice in the crowd can change things quite a bit," Turrisi said.

Parents also can improve their child's willingness to speak up by encouraging him or her to pursue multiple interests, with different groups of friends, Turrisi added.

"One of the things kids will be influenced by is the prospect of losing their friends if they don't go along with the crowd," Turrisi said. "If kids have multiple different friends, it's easier for them to resist one group and know that they won't become socially isolated."

More information: For more on teens riding with drunk drivers, visit [Mothers Against Drunk Driving](#).

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