



## TOPIC

# Implementing Policies Targeting Underage Drinking and Alcohol-Impaired Driving

## PROBLEM

Late adolescence is the time of life when most people begin driving. Thus, the risks of accidents involving alcohol are particularly pronounced for adolescents. The CDC reports that high school students drive after drinking about 2.4 million times each month, and that underage drivers are 17 times more likely to die in a car crash when they are intoxicated than when sober.

Policies targeting adults, such as higher alcohol taxes, often have positive spillover effects on youth alcohol use. However, given the high prevalence of underage drinking and driving, it is important to implement policies that focus specifically on adolescents.

## SOLUTIONS



Reducing underage drinking has many health benefits, but it can also significantly decrease alcohol-involved auto accidents.

# 21+

Rigorous research shows that announcing and implementing a minimum drinking age reduces car accidents and illegal sales to youth.



Establishing blood alcohol levels for youth that are lower than adult BACs reduces driving and drinking among adolescents.

## CONCLUSION

A range of policies, including raising the minimum drinking age and setting blood-alcohol-level (BAC) standards, have been proven to reduce youth drinking and alcohol-impaired-driving. States and communities that do not have such policies in place could likely achieve those benefits by adopting them. Even states and communities that do implement these policies can still improve by consistently enforcing them.



## KEY POLICY EVIDENCE

Raising the U.S. drinking age to 21 was followed by a 16% reduction in alcohol-related automobile accidents involving people aged 18 to 20. Among fatally-injured drivers aged 16 to 20, the proportion testing positive for alcohol declined from 61% to 31%.

In a 2002 study on the effects of minimum legal drinking age laws (MLDA), 98% of analyses found an association between higher MLDA and decreased traffic crashes.

Passage of state “use/lose” laws, which restricted driving privileges as a penalty for underage alcohol use, lowered rates of youth driving after drinking and rates of youth riding in a car with a driver who had been drinking.

Laws that hold commercial establishments liable for serving underage drinkers and intoxicated patrons are estimated to reduce motor vehicle fatalities among underage drinkers between 2.2% and 13.0%.

Setting the blood-alcohol standard for alcohol-impaired driving for minors to be lower than for adults (e.g., zero versus .08 BAC) led to a 16% decline in nighttime single-vehicle crashes among individuals aged 15-20. These laws may also reduce binge drinking by young males.

### LEARN MORE

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When I think about policies for reducing adolescent risk behavior, particularly around substance use, the first has to do with access: reducing adolescents' ability to actually purchase and/or receive these products at the point of sale and through the internet. That includes increasing the age of access and verification.”

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