

Risks associated with underage drinking

Brain Development

During childhood and teenage years, the brain is still developing. Adding alcohol to that process can **affect memory function, reactions, learning ability and attention span** – all especially important during school years. Drinking could affect performance at school.



Alcohol Poisoning

Anyone who drinks a lot in a short space of time can suffer alcohol poisoning. The level of alcohol gets so high that **the brain's vital functions are blocked**. People who slip into an alcohol coma may die by choking on their own vomit. Nearly 4000 children were hospitalised with alcohol poisoning last year.



Accidents and Injuries

Alcohol can **reduce a young person's mental and physical abilities, affecting judgment and co-ordination**. Research shows adolescents who tested positive for alcohol were more likely to get injured or have accidents than non-drinkers. And they're more likely to be a passenger in a drink-driving incident.



Aggression and Violence

Children and teenagers who drink have **less self-control and their brains struggle to recognise 'warning signs'**. This can lead to aggression and fights. Evidence shows there's a **greater risk of being involved in violence and serious vandalism** when alcohol is consumed. This could lead to arrest and a criminal record.



Drug Use

Underage drinking is at times **linked to harmful behaviours like taking illicit drugs**. Compared to non-drinkers, underage drinkers are more likely to smoke tobacco, use cannabis or use other hard drugs. And this link has been found even if they get drunk on just one occasion.



Unprotected Sex

When young people drink their **decision-making skills are affected and they're more likely to take big risks** – like having unprotected sex. That can lead to **sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy**.



Liver Damage

Young people who drink regularly are **at risk of damaging their livers without realising**. The warning signs only show after a few years. In Britain, people have died with alcoholic liver disease in their twenties.



Appearance and Side Effects

Research shows that underage drinkers are more likely to **suffer from a range of health issues** including major weight gain or weight loss, bad skin, disturbed sleep and headaches.



Mental Health

Alcohol doesn't just affect young people physically. Evidence points to **alcohol misuse and mental disorders being closely related**. In other words, young people who drink excessively may be more likely to also have **disturbed mental health, even self-harm**.



Vulnerability

During puberty young people may have an **increased tendency to experiment and take risks**. Adding alcohol to the mix can put them in **vulnerable or dangerous situations**. For example, over a third of 16 and 17 year-olds have walked home alone at night whilst drunk.



Education and Truancy

The stats show **underage drinking makes performing well at school less likely**. Evidence reveals that children who start to drink by age 13 are more likely to go on to have worse grades, to skip school or be excluded from school.

