

## Commentary - Underage drinking risky for youths



**Underage drinking risky for youths** Commentary by Earl Rivers 1st Special Operations Medical Group ADAPT Program 8/25/2010 - **HURLBURT FIELD, Fla.** -- Underage drinking presents a significant public health concern. Alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug among youth in the United States, more than tobacco and illicit drugs. In the U.S. each year, alcohol consumption contributes to more than 4,600 deaths among young people less than 21 years of age. The following statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism paint a clear picture of just how big a problem underage drinking is in the U.S.: - People between the ages of 12 and 20 drink 11 percent of all alcohol consumed in the U.S. - More than 90 percent of this alcohol is consumed in the form of binge drinking, which is defined as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration to 0.08 percent or above. For the typical adult, this pattern corresponds to men consuming five or more drinks, and women consuming four or more drinks, in about two hours. - The proportion of current drinkers that binge drink is highest in the 18- to 20-year-old group at 51 percent. - On average, underage drinkers consume more drinks per drinking occasion than adult drinkers. Serious consequences can result from underage drinking. For example, underage drinkers are more likely to experience alcohol poisoning, which is defined as a medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels that suppress the central nervous system and can cause loss of consciousness, low blood pressure, low body temperature, coma, respiratory depression, or death. Underage drinkers also increase their potential for abuse of other drugs. They may also suffer from: - Changes in brain development that may have life-long effects. - Disruption of normal growth and development. - Unplanned and unprotected sexual activity. - Physical and sexual assault. - Physical problems such as hangovers or illnesses. - Memory problems. - School problems such as higher absence and poor or failing grades. - Social problems such as fighting and lack of participation in activities. - Legal problems such as arrest for driving under the influence or hurting someone while drunk. - Higher risk for suicide and homicide. Youth who start drinking before age 15 years are also five times more likely to develop alcohol dependence or alcohol abuse later in life than those who begin drinking after they turn 21 years. The Hurlburt Field Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment program provides a wide range of prevention, education, outreach, evaluation and treatment services to active duty members. For more information on this topic please contact the ADAPT program, which is located on the second floor of the 1st Special Operations Medical Group, building 91020, or call 881-4237. Family members of active duty should contact TriCare-partner Value Options at (800) 700-8646 for information or assistance in obtaining substance abuse evaluation and treatment services.