

Underage Drinking in West Virginia

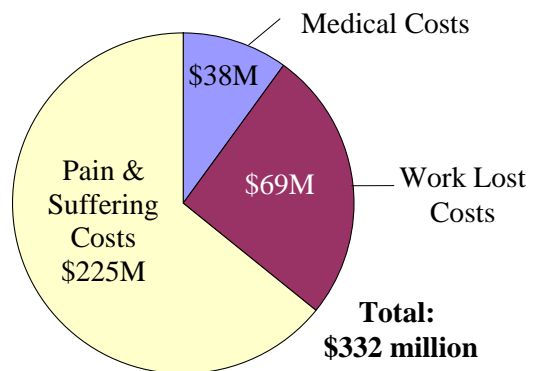
The Facts

Tragic health, social, and economic problems result from the use of alcohol by youth. Underage drinking is a causal factor in a host of serious problems, including homicide, suicide, traumatic injury, drowning, burns, violent and property crime, high risk sex, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol poisoning, and need for treatment for alcohol abuse and dependence.

Problems and Costs Associated with Underage Drinking in West Virginia

Underage drinking cost the citizens of West Virginia \$332 million in 2007. These costs include medical care, work loss, and pain and suffering associated with the multiple problems resulting from the use of alcohol by youth.¹ This translates to a cost of \$2,040 per year for each youth in the State. West Virginia ranks 32nd highest among the 50 states for the cost per youth of underage drinking. Excluding pain and suffering from these costs, the direct costs of underage drinking incurred through medical care and loss of work cost West Virginia \$107 million each year.

**Costs of Underage Drinking
West Virginia 2007**



Costs of Underage Drinking by Problem, West Virginia 2007

| Problem | Total Costs (in millions) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Youth Violence | \$208.9 |
| Youth Traffic Crashes | \$52.0 |
| High-Risk Sex, Ages 14-20 | \$29.5 |
| Youth Property Crime | \$14.4 |
| Youth Injury | \$9.4 |
| Poisonings and Psychoses | \$2.3 |
| FAS Among Mothers Age 15-20 | \$7.3 |
| Youth Alcohol Treatment | \$8.5 |
| Total | \$332.3 |

Youth violence and traffic crashes attributable to alcohol use by underage youth in West Virginia represent the largest costs for the State. However, a host of other problems contribute substantially to the overall cost. Among teen mothers, fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) alone costs West Virginia \$7.3 million.

Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence

and are two and a half times more likely to become abusers of alcohol than those who begin drinking at age 21.² In 2006, 250 youth 12- 20 years old were admitted for alcohol treatment in West Virginia, accounting for 6% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the State.³

Alcohol Consumption by Youth in West Virginia

Underage drinking is widespread in West Virginia. Approximately 76,000 underage youth in West Virginia drink each year. In 2007, according to self-reports by West Virginian students in grades 9-12:⁴

- 75% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 28% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 44% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasion in the past 30 days.
- 30% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (i.e. binge drinking) in the past 30 days.
- 6% had at least one drink of alcohol on school property in the past 30 days.

In 2007, underage drinkers consumed 20.9% of all alcohol sold in West Virginia, totaling \$139 million in sales. These sales provided profits of \$68 million to the alcohol industry.¹

Harm Associated with Underage Drinking in West Virginia

Underage drinking in West Virginia leads to substantial harm due to traffic crashes, violent crime, property crime, unintentional injury, and risky sex.

- During 2007, an estimated 12 traffic fatalities and 600 nonfatal traffic injuries involved an underage drinking driver.
- In 2006, an estimated 8 homicides; 4,000 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery and assault; and 9,100 property crimes including burglary, larceny, and car theft involved an underage drinking perpetrator.
- In 2006, an estimated 2 alcohol involved fatal burns, drownings, and suicides involved underage drinking.
- In 2006, an estimated 1,100 teen pregnancies and 5,200 risky sexual acts by teens involved alcohol.

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¹ Miller, TR, Levy, DT, Spicer, RS, & Taylor, DM. (2006) Societal costs of underage drinking *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 67(4) 519-528

² Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. (1997). Age at onset of alcohol use and its association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the Nation Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9: 103-110.

³ Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). (2006). *Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance of Abuse, According to Sex, Age, Race, and Ethnicity*.

⁴ Center for Disease Control (CDC). (2007). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).