

## FACT SHEET

# Binge Drinking

## What is it?

- Drinking large amounts of alcohol in a short period of time causing intoxication (heavy, single occasion drinking).
- According to the *Canadian Medical Association*, a binge is considered 5 or more drinks for men, or 4 or more drinks for women on one occasion.

## What are, or can be, the immediate effects of binge drinking?

- trouble walking
- low blood pressure
- blurred vision
- lowered breathing
- slurred speech
- lowered pulse
- becoming aggressive
- becoming violent
- vomiting
- blacking-out
- passing-out (unconscious)
- cold, clammy skin
- shallow breathing
- severe dehydration
- death

- Binge drinking is more harmful to brain cells than any other pattern of drinking.
- You may put yourself in risky situations when “binging” (driving while impaired, having unprotected sex, taking unsafe action that could cause injury).
- Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause permanent damage to the developing fetus.
- Binge drinkers can pass-out and then throw-up. There is potential to choke on vomit and die.
- Many Binge drinkers are absent from work, or are less productive while drinking or experiencing a hang-over.
- Binge drinking is a greater public-health problem than alcoholism, as it effects a higher percentage of drinkers. Binge drinking has wide-reaching impacts on the health, safety and well-being of individuals and communities.
- The impact of alcohol in Saskatchewan, in terms of death, illness and economic costs, adds up to 508.7 million dollars annually. This is a cost of 503 dollars for each person in the province.

## What are, or can be, the long term effects of binge drinking?

- permanent brain damage
- skin problems
- stomach ulcers
- vitamin deficiencies
- sexual problems
- mood changes
- emotional changes
- memory loss
- liver damage
- heart and circulatory problems
- many types of cancer
- psychological dependency
- physical dependency
- increasing tolerance
- problems at work or school
- relationship problems
- legal problems
- loss of control over use
- withdrawal
- giving up important social, recreational or occupational activities

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### Signs of alcohol over dose:

- cold clammy, pale or bluish skin.
- non-responsive to efforts to be awoken.
- not waking up after vomiting.
- slow shallow breathing (8 breaths per minute or less).
- not responding to being pinched, poked or shaken.
- rapid heart beat.
- unable to stand.

### Get Help!

If you suspect someone has an alcohol overdose (poisoning):

- get medical help as soon as possible (911)
- do not leave the person alone
- place the person on their side in the recovery position - see box below

#### Recovery Position:

- Turn person onto their side.
- Lift chin forward in open airway position and adjust hand as necessary to hold head in position.
- Use pillows or other supports to ensure the person cannot roll forwards or backwards.
- Monitor their breathing.

#### Sources:

- Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM)
- Saskatchewan Addiction Awareness Week: Reality Check Series
- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse: *The Cost of Substance Abuse in Canada 2002* (Report)
- Henry Wechsler, Harvard School of Public Health