

## April is Alcohol Awareness Month

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Communities can help stop under-age drinking

When anyone under the age of 21 is caught drinking we refer to it as underage drinking. Drinking alcohol doesn't only get your kids grounded or possibly taken to jail, it harms their growing body and brain. And recent studies show that alcohol is the drug of choice for teens, even over cigarettes and marijuana.

Most kids who start drinking do so when they are between 13-14 years old and the rates of death and injury nearly triple between the early teen years and the early adult life. Dangerous activities like underage drinking play a large roll in that. And most of you are probably thinking that boys drink a lot more and younger than the girls, but according to studies and polls done of youth, they are pretty much neck and neck.

Many people don't know what all underage drinking can cause but it can be grave. It is a major cause of deaths in youth, can increase the risk of carrying out or being a victim of a physical or sexual assault; and can severely damage the brain. Researchers have figured out that the human brain continues to grow and develop through our mid-20's.

Underaged drinking is a public health and safety problem that results in serious personal, social and economic consequences for adolescents, their family and their community. Resources available to our community include: Area Prevention Resource Center, Robbie Mullins at 580-286-33474; Pushmataha County Health Department 580-298-6624; Pushmataha Turning Point Coalition, Arlinda Copeland 580-298-6624; and Youth & Adults Take Action (YATA Grant), Kelly Jennings 580-286-3344. Or go to any of these websites: [surgeongeneral.gov](http://surgeongeneral.gov); [stopalcoholabuse.gov](http://stopalcoholabuse.gov); [niaa.nih.gov](http://niaa.nih.gov); or [ncadi.samhsa.gov](http://ncadi.samhsa.gov).