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Substance Abuse Prevention – Everyone Can Play a Part

SPRINGFIELD, IL – October is National Substance Abuse Prevention Month, which focuses on the role substance abuse prevention plays in promoting safe and healthy communities. Underage drinking, non-medical use of prescription drugs, and illicit drug use take a devastating toll on our families and in our communities, exacting more than \$740 billion annually in costs related to crime, lost work productivity and health care.ⁱ

“Stopping substance abuse before it begins can increase a person’s chances at living a longer, healthier and more productive life,” comments Karel Homrig, Executive Director of Prevention First. “An excellent way to stop abuse before it starts is to work with teens. The teenage brain is very “plastic,” just as it was in early childhood. This means it transforms, grows, and learns more fluidly than the adult brain. The experiences a teen has shapes their life as an adult.”

When a teen uses drugs or alcohol, his brain is rewired to continue the unhealthy behavior. Because of the plasticity of the teenage brain, addiction can happen relatively easily. However, the same plasticity causes teens to respond well to interventions, programs, and services that promote a healthy lifestyle. Because of this unique development period, it is important and beneficial to provide teenage substance abuse prevention services.

Evidence-based programs and practices are essential tools to reduce substance use and help people lead healthier lives. According to The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy’s 2012 National Drug Control Strategy, each **dollar** invested in an evidence-based prevention program can reduce costs related to substance use disorders by an average of **\$18.00**.

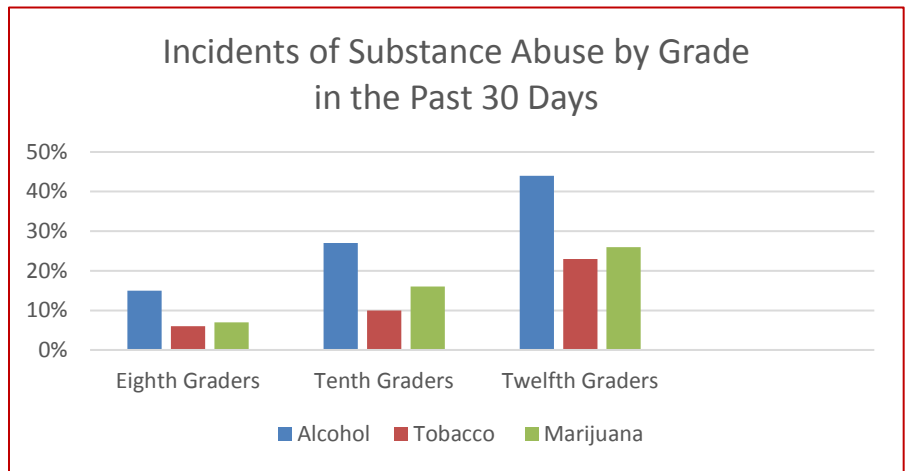
There are many evidence-based ways families, communities, and schools can help adolescents be healthier, safer, and head into adulthood stronger and at less risk for addiction:

- Communities can start a dialogue discussing their commitment to the prevention of substance abuse. Starting this conversation is the first step toward change, and putting it into action is where change happens. If a community coalition focused on prevention doesn’t already exist, here are some tools to get one started:
 - Prevention First Alcohol Policy Resource Center: <https://www.prevention.org/Alcohol-Policy-Center/>
 - <http://ctb.ku.edu/en>
 - <http://coalitionswork.com/>
- Schools can start a Students Against Destructive Decisions chapter by contacting robyn.block@prevention.org, or consider implementing effective programs that provide substance abuse prevention programs, by visiting <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/landing.aspx>.
- Parents can talk to their kids about the dangers of drugs and underage drinking. This free toolkit from the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids can help: <https://drugfree.org/article/talk-with-your-kids/>. The Partnership also provides a help line (1-855-378-4373) and live chat at <https://drugfree.org/article/get-one-on-one-help/>.

Prevention First is Illinois’ ONLY nonprofit resource center specializing in preventing alcohol and other drug use among youth and pregnant women.

Among Illinois youth, the most commonly abused substance is alcohol. As indicated on the chart, nearly 45% of high school seniors consumed alcohol in the past 30 days. However, the following activities are on the decline from 2012 – 2014:

- underage drinking overall
- binge drinking
- driving after drinking
- several other health and academic consequences of underage drinking



Source: Illinois Youth Survey <https://goo.gl/nqNqQo>

Additionally, use of alcohol in the past year and in the past 30 days is lower among 8th and 10th grade youth in 2014 than in 2012 and trends indicate that fewer 10th and 12th graders also choose to binge drink (i.e., consume five or more alcoholic drinks in a row).

Prevention is also needed as our nation is faced with unprecedented consequences of opioid misuse and addiction. According to SAMHSA’s National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in 2016 an estimated 11.8 million people misused opioids in the past year, including 11.5 million pain reliever misusers and 948,000 heroin users. The Illinois Department of Public Health reports that in 2014, more people in Illinois died from an opioid drug overdose (due to heroin and prescription opioid pain relievers) than from homicide or motor vehicle accidents.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Illinois is one of 19 states that saw a statistically significant drug overdose death rate increase (7.6%) from 2014 to 2015. Provisional data from the Illinois Department of Public Health Illinois Center for Health Statistics indicates deaths from any opioid increased from 1,072 in 2013 to 1,889 in 2016.

Removing unneeded supplies of commonly prescribed opioids such as Vicodin, oxycodone, OxyContin, and Hydrocodone from homes is a vital step to take in preventing abuse of these highly addictive drugs. These drugs are similar to and affect the brain the same way as heroin, especially if they are used for non-medical purposes.

One way to prevent the abuse of the potentially dangerous expired, unused, or unwanted prescription drugs is to participate in National Drug Take Back Day, which is October 28, 2017, from 10 am – 2 pm. Those in or around Springfield can bring their unwanted prescription and nonprescription drugs to Prevention First, located at 2800 Montvale Drive, Springfield. The Springfield Police Department and the Drug Enforcement Agency will be on site to provide this free service, with no questions asked. Visit https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/ for more information on Drug Take Back Day and to locate local disposal locations.

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¹ NIDA. (2017, April 24). Trends & Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics> on 2017, September 15
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