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FACT SHEET: ALCOHOL AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

- Rates of hospitalizations for alcohol overdoses, drug overdoses, and their combination all increased from 1999 to 2008 among 18- to 24-year-olds. The cost of such hospitalizations now exceeds $1.2 billion annually. The steepest increase occurred among cases of combined alcohol and drug overdoses. Stronger efforts are needed to educate medical practitioners and the public about the risk of overdoses, particularly when alcohol is combined with other drugs. (*J. Stud. Alcohol Drugs, 72,* 774–786, 2011)

- Alcohol interacts with a wide variety of illicit and prescription drugs, including opioids and related narcotics analgesics, sedatives and tranquilizers (NIAAA, 1995; Tanaka, 2002)

- In 2007, data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) suggested that 26% of all emergency department visits resulting from the use of benzodiazepine sedatives and tranquilizers and 14% of visits stemming from the use of opioids and related narcotic pain medications (SAMHSA 2010c)

- Blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) required for fatal overdoses are lower when alcohol is combined with prescription drugs (Jones et al., 2011)

- Data from the National Epidemiologic Study on Alcohol and Related Conditions indicate that the combined use of alcohol and other drugs peaks in the 18 to 24 age range (McCabe et al., 2006)

- In the 18-24 year olds, it is possible that the increasing rates of hospitalizations and deaths because of drug overdoses are related to an increase in the excessive use of alcohol along with other drugs

- Mixing alcohol with certain medications can cause nausea and vomiting, headaches, drowsiness, fainting or loss of coordination. It can also put you at risk for internal bleeding, heart problems, and difficulties in breathing. In addition to these dangers, alcohol can make a medication less effective or even useless, or it may make the medication harmful or toxic to your body

- Certain medicines contain up to 10% alcohol. Cough syrup and laxatives may have some of the highest alcohol concentrations

- Women, in general, have a higher risk for problems than men because of the lesser amount of body water. Because alcohol mixes with body water, a given amount of alcohol is more concentrated in a woman's body than in a man's. As a result, women are more susceptible to alcohol related damage to organs such as liver.

- Older people are at particularly high risk for harmful alcohol – medication interactions. Aging slows the body's ability to break down alcohol, so alcohol remains in a person's system longer. Older people also are more likely to take a medication with alcohol, in fact, they often need to take more than one of these medications.

REFERENCES

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