

## **Darien Health Dept: How Many of These Risks from Under-Age Drinking Do You Know?**

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*A statement on supporting the Thriving Youth Task Force's campaign against under-age drinking in town, from Darien Health Director David Knauf:*

The Darien Health Department has recently concluded a series of presentations entitled “Darien, How Healthy Are We?” which was an overview of the health status of our community and comparing recent data with the findings of the last health assessment conducted in 2007.

*[Editor's note: You can see videos of the three meetings [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).]*

While chronic illnesses such as cancer and cardiovascular disease still claim the most lives in Darien, police activity and EMS response calls have noted a definite increase in drug and alcohol abuse in recent years. Additionally, the Thriving Youth Task Force has identified “binge drinking”, as having become quite prevalent in Darien.

A few facts worth noting:

***\* Alcohol and tobacco are usually the first drugs that young people experiment with or use.*** While the use of alcohol and tobacco does not cause all young people to develop problems associated with drug use, there is evidence that using these substances creates situations/environments that are supportive of future/further drug use.

***\* There are several reasons young people usually try these drugs first: availability, affordability and accessibility.*** Young people report having little difficulty in accessing alcohol and tobacco. Alcohol is usually available at home, as are many prescription drugs commonly found, unsecure, in bathroom medicine cabinets.

***\* Adolescents who drink heavily or who "binge drink" are more likely to use other drugs than non-drinkers.*** It is a short, easy step to go from binge drinking to drug use, because of impaired thought processes while drinking and the teenage invincibility belief characterized by “Why not? I can recover after drinking so I can recover after taking drugs.” And then there is the assertion that “I won’t get addicted; it won’t happen to me!”

***\* Excessive alcohol and drug use is often linked with sexually transmitted disease and other forms of violence, including rape.***

The fact is that no one takes drugs or drinks because they want to become addicted or an alcoholic, it just happens. Parents never really think it will happen to their child until it does, and then it is simply the worst nightmare a parent can have.

People move to Darien to take advantage of the excellent school system and give their children every opportunity to succeed in life. Parents can’t rely on children to make the right choices, especially when confronted with the stress created by expectations to succeed that characterize life in Darien.

According to the Thriving Youth survey:

***\* Fewer than 1/3 of 12th grade students believe that the family has clear rules and consequences.***

***\* Fewer than 1/3 of 12th grade students consider their parents as positive role models.***

Parents and adults who turn a blind eye to drinking and other behavioral activities that could signal drug abuse will only make the problem worse. This is not a situation that government can solve legislatively or

through police activity.

We want every child in Darien to grow up healthy and reach their full potential. As town leaders, human service professionals and parents, we simply cannot condone underage drinking not only because it is illegal, but because it can have profoundly negative effects on a young person's future.

Your support and involvement in the campaign addressing underage drinking can really make a difference. To learn more about what you can do, please visit the [OurDarien.com](https://OurDarien.com) website.

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***See also:***

- [Overcoming Opioids: Big Increase in Prescription Drugs Collected at Drop Boxes in CT](#) (Feb. 18)
- [DHS Principal Ellen Dunn on Drugs, Drinking, Disciplining Students and What Parents Can Do](#) (Feb. 12)
- [Panelists: High Rate of Teen Drinking in Darien Comes with High Stress, Lax Attitudes](#) (Feb. 8)
- [Group Launches Campaign to Counter Darien's 'Troubling Rate of Teenage Binge Drinking'](#) (Feb. 2)
- [DRINKING IN DARIEN: Worse than Elsewhere for Both Teens and Adults — and the Problem is Growing](#) (Jan. 30)

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