



Enforcement Strategies to Reduce Underage Drinking

Laws and regulations must be enforced in order to be effective. Police officers, in particular, play a critical role in enforcement efforts and, as such, should be represented on community advisory boards, health task forces, or school and community coalitions. Police, however, are not the only ones who are key to enforcement in the community. Young people, their parents, and other community members also play an important role in combination with police. Prevention practitioners can educate law enforcement about the effectiveness of existing enforcement strategies and key program elements that increase their effectiveness.

Research suggests that communities are more likely to reduce underage drinking and its consequences if they:

- **Enforce minor-in-possession as well as minimum-age-of-purchase laws using undercover buying operations, also known as compliance checks.**
Undercover community buying operations that provide positive and negative feedback to merchants are effective in increasing retailer compliance with underage drinking laws.¹
- **Limit driving privileges for those who violate minimum-age purchase and minor-in-possession laws.**
Suspending the driver's license of a person under age 21 following a conviction for any alcohol or other drug violation is an effective way to increase compliance with minimum-age of purchase and minor-in-possession laws among youth.²
- **Enforce impaired driving laws.**
This kind of enforcement is important because it increases public perception of the risk of being caught and punished for driving under the influence of alcohol. Sobriety checkpoints are one example of this kind of public enforcement of underage drinking laws.³
- **Pair enforcement of laws against sales to minors with server training.**
Such pairing increases the effectiveness of training programs in producing changes in selling and serving practices.⁴
- **Educate the public about increased enforcement efforts.**
For policy changes and enforcement to be successful, the public must know what policies they are expected to follow, and the extent to which penalties for violating such policies are appropriately severe and swiftly and consistently implemented.⁵

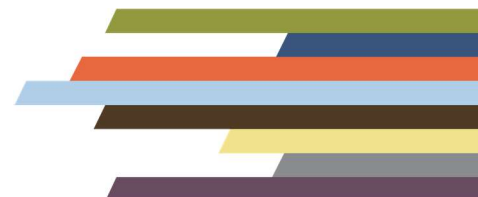


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The following are examples of enforcement strategies that can be enacted to reduce underage drinking. Click on the title of the strategy for more information.

- [Alcohol Purchase Surveys](#)
Alcohol purchase surveys, also known as compliance surveys, use young adults who appear—but are not—underage as decoys to attempt to purchase alcohol from retail stores. This strategy, which can reveal how easily available alcohol is to young people and who is selling it to them, can be used when compliance checks are not possible (e.g., law does not permit underage decoys to buy alcohol, lack of law enforcement capacity).
- [Compliance Checks](#)
Compliance checks use underage decoys to attempt to purchase alcohol from retail merchants.
- [Cops In Shops](#)
Cops in Shops programs involve undercover law enforcement officers issuing citations or making arrests for underage purchases, attempts to purchase, and related violations such as adults purchasing alcohol for underage youth.
- [Juvenile Diversion](#)
Juvenile Diversion programs are typically for first-time youth offenders who have been arrested for drug or alcohol-related crimes (e.g., driving while intoxicated, underage possession of alcohol, disorderly behavior resulting from intoxication). As an alternative to processing offenders through the court system, resulting in fines or incarceration, diverted youth receive sanctions and services designed to address risk factors that contribute to alcohol-related offenses. Diversion programs vary in length, services provided, and requirements for parent/guardian involvement.
- [Party Patrols](#)
Law enforcement officers respond to reports of unruly parties in residential areas and ticket underage youth in possession of alcohol and the adults who provided the alcohol. Enforcement costs are covered by fines levied against property owners when police respond to a disturbance associated with a party involving underage drinking.
- [Sobriety Checkpoints](#)
Law enforcement officials use sobriety checkpoints to evaluate drivers for signs of alcohol or drug impairment and enforce existing driving under the influence (DUI) or driving while intoxicated (DWI) laws accordingly.

*(This material is an excerpt from Prevention Solutions@EDC,
<https://preventionsolutions.edc.org/services/resources/policy-strategies>)*



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