

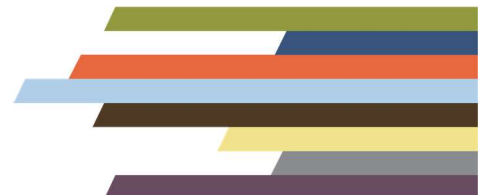


Policy Strategies to Reduce Underage Drinking

Lawmakers have developed, enacted, and applied a variety of policy strategies that target society- and community-level influences to reduce underage drinking and its associated consequences. These strategies include policies such as raising the minimum legal drinking age (MLDA), setting lower blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limits for young drivers, and limiting commercial and social access to alcohol.

Research suggests that policies are more likely to be effective if they do the following:

- **Hold adults accountable.**
For example, adults can be held accountable for the purchase of beer kegs. State **keg registration** laws requiring retailers to tag, sticker, or engrave an identification number on kegs that exceed a specified capacity (two- to eight-gallon minimum, depending on the state), help law enforcement identify the liable adult that purchased kegs used in underage drinking situations.¹
- **Increase the price of alcohol.**
Increasing the price of alcohol through excise taxes is associated with effectively reducing underage consumption—both the number of times consumed and amount consumed.² Price increases are also associated with reductions in various alcohol-related problems, including motor vehicle fatalities and driving while intoxicated.³
- **Provide deterrents to using alcohol or incentives for not using.**
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 minors in possession laws.⁴ Setting the legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit to 0.00 or 0.02 for young people under the age of 21 also has been shown to reduce traffic deaths among young people.⁵ Reduced BAC levels for minors are usually paired with a variety of driving restrictions that are gradually lifted as the driver gains experience.
- **Restrict use and sale of alcohol.**
Restricting alcohol sales at youth- and community-oriented events (e.g., county fairs, sporting events, political fundraisers) *may lead* to reduced underage consumption and its consequences.⁶
- **Restrict alcohol advertising that targets young people.**
Prohibiting advertisements that target minors is associated with fewer youth alcohol-related, single-vehicle, and driver traffic fatalities.⁷ Both partial and complete bans on alcohol advertising are associated with reduced alcohol consumption, including adolescent binge drinking.⁸



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- **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 applied.

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

- [Alcohol Advertising Restrictions](#)

Alcohol advertising restrictions include any policies that limit advertising of alcoholic beverages, particularly advertisements that expose young people to pro-alcohol messages. They can include regulations on electronic media (e.g., radio, television internet), print media (e.g., magazines and newspapers), outdoor billboards, and signs.

- [Alcohol Home Delivery Restrictions](#)

Alcohol home delivery restrictions prohibit or limit the ability of alcohol retailers to deliver alcoholic beverages to personal residences.

- [Alcohol Price Increases](#)

Alcohol price increases involve raising the unit price of alcohol by raising excise taxes (often included in the price of alcohol) and/or sales taxes (charged in addition to the price of alcohol). The revenue generated from tax increase(s) can be used to support public health and public safety services.

- [Alcohol Restrictions at Community Events](#)

Alcohol restrictions at community events are policies that control the availability and use of alcohol at public venues (e.g., concerts, street fairs, and sporting events). Restrictions can be implemented voluntarily by event organizers or through local legislation.

- [Beer Keg Registration](#)

Beer keg registration requires retailers to tag, sticker, or engrave an identification number on kegs that exceed a specified capacity (two- to eight-gallon minimum depending on the state). Tagged kegs help law enforcement officers identify the liable adult who purchased the keg used in underage drinking situations.

- [Blood Alcohol Concentration \(BAC\) Limits for Minors](#)

Blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limits for minors laws ban youth under the age of 21 from driving with a blood alcohol content above measurable levels (usually 0.01–0.02 compared to 0.08 for adults).

- [Dram Shop Liability](#)

Dram shop liability laws are statutory (i.e., written) provisions that allow licensed drinking establishments (e.g., restaurants, bars, liquor stores) to be held financially liable for serving alcohol to an underage or intoxicated person who later causes injury to a third party.

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- [Graduated Driver's License Laws](#)
Graduated driver's license (GDL) laws require new drivers to move through a series of stages before obtaining full driving privileges. Most states require new drivers to demonstrate responsible driving behavior during two stages of licensing—supervised learner's permit followed by intermediate or provisional license—before advancing to the unrestricted or full license. All states impose some type of graduated licensing, but the specific requirements vary.
- [Happy Hour Restrictions](#)
Happy hour restrictions are policies that reduce or limit alcohol price promotions and specials. Happy hour promotions often attract younger drinkers and encourage binge-drinking by making alcohol less expensive.
- [Limit Location and Density of Alcoholic Beverage Outlets](#)
Local licensing or zoning ordinances can limit the location and density (i.e., number within a geographic area) of outlets within a community where alcohol can be legally sold for the buyer to drink on-premise (e.g., bars, restaurants) or off-premise (e.g., liquor stores).
- [Minimum Age of Alcohol Purchase, Sale, and Server Laws](#)
Minimum age of alcohol purchase, sale, and server laws are a suite of alcohol control policies that stipulate the minimum age for alcohol transactions. Minimum age of purchase laws prohibit minors from buying or attempting to buy alcoholic beverages. Minimum age of seller laws specify a minimum age for employees who sell alcoholic beverages in off-premises establishments (e.g., liquor, grocery, and convenience stores). Minimum age of server laws specify a minimum age for employees who serve or dispense alcoholic beverages in on-premises establishments (e.g., bars and restaurants).
- [Minor in Possession of Alcohol Laws](#)
Minor in possession of alcohol laws prohibit the possession, consumption, or internal possession of alcohol by underage youth.
- [Responsible Beverage Server/Seller Training Ordinance](#)
State laws and/or local ordinances can mandate responsible beverage server/seller training (RBST) designed to provide alcohol outlet owners, managers, and staff with the knowledge and skills needed to serve alcohol responsibly and fulfill the legal requirements of alcohol service.
- [Social Host Liability Laws](#)
Social host liability laws impose civil and/or criminal penalties on individuals (social hosts) for underage drinking events held on property they own, lease, or otherwise control.

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

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