

# Alcohol Awareness Month

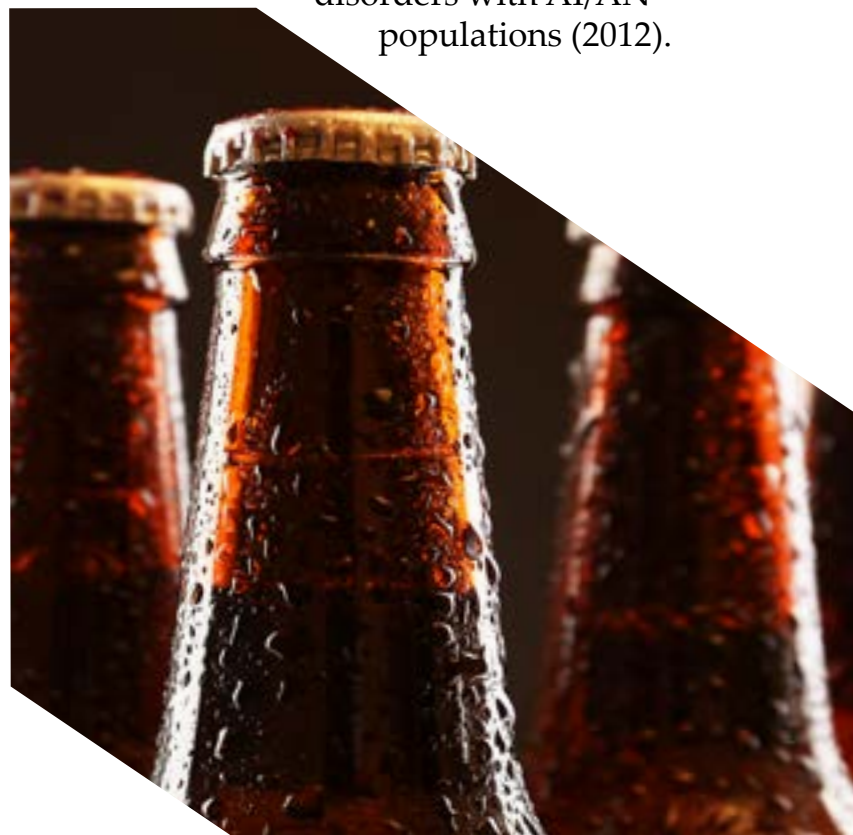
American Indians and Alaska Natives are less likely than any other racial or ethnic group to use alcohol at all.

At the same time, alcohol is the most-used substance among Native peoples. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 3 in 10 Native American young adults (age 18-25) report binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks in 2 hours); 1 in 11 report heavy alcohol use (binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past month); and 1 in 10 have an alcohol use disorder (2018). Moreover, 1 in 6 Native youth (age 12-17) engage in under-age drinking, the highest rate of alcohol use of all racial/ethnic groups (SAMHSA, 2019).

“The ones that matter most are the children.”

Lakota proverb

The high prevalence of alcohol use among Native Americans is attributed to factors stemming from colonization, including poverty, historical and intergenerational traumas, and health inequities. The era of boarding schools has also contributed to higher and long-term alcohol use disorders with AI/AN populations (2012).



Alcohol is the most widely used substance. Often it is used to celebrate life's momentous events and for socializing. Some religious communities use it for rituals. Among American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities, alcohol has been used to barter and influence relationships with others— and, tragically, it has caused harm and destruction in families.

### One man's story

Some years ago, there was a Native teenager who knew how to always engage with people around him. He would bring about laughter and many smiles with friends and family as he would offer jokes. His direction in life was on a good path. His future options seemed as though he could manage almost any task put in front of him. Shortly after graduation from high school he decided to join the United States Marines. With his training and travels, he began to see so many more options for his future, until learning about his father becoming terminally ill. The young teen was now a young man and decided to complete his initial duty to the Corps and then return home to help his family. His father's passing came sooner than anticipated. The family was distraught. He could no longer see his future. He gave in to drinking heavily as his way to cope. The next few years he participated in traditional ceremonies, entered treatment, and tried to live up to his family's expectations. It was overwhelming. When the pandemic occurred his feelings of isolation, depression, and loss of his father resurfaced. The spirit of alcohol filled him. The spirit of alcohol took him. No longer will his friends and family hear him telling jokes. Instead, the family is living with the harmful destruction alcohol has caused for each of them.



### Alcohol and the Teenage Brain

Research demonstrates that the frontal cortex – the part of the brain responsible for logic and reasoning – isn't fully developed until the mid-20s for most people. Prior to that, adolescent decision-making is controlled more by the amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for emotional reactions, including fear and aggression.

Brain development addresses three types of function: working memory, mental flexibility needed for growth, and personal self-control. These skills are vital for a child's growth so they can make healthy choices as they continue through adolescence and into adulthood. Teenagers' brain development is not the same as a fully grown adult. Guiding them to practice making good decisions is paramount when they face various challenges in life such as using or misusing alcohol.

The image below is of functional MRI scans of two teens while they took a working memory test. The areas highlighted in pink and red are the areas of the brain normally used to complete a memory test. The non-drinker's image on the left shows those areas as active. The heavy drinker's image on the right shows minimal to no activity in those regions. Researchers suggest that in school, heavy drinkers may not be activating those regions of the brain required to remember a lesson.

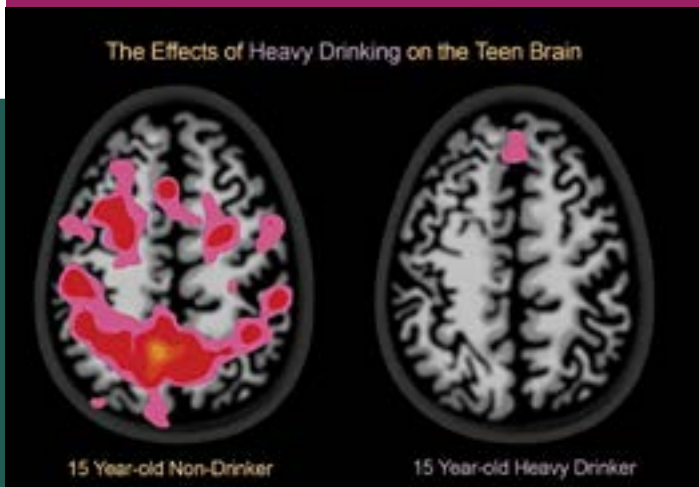


Photo: Susan Tapert, PhD, University of California, San Diego. (www.standstrongcoalition.com)

### NATIVE PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR PREVENTION

There are programs, products, and organizations that can help influence Native youth in making healthy choices. Helping AI/AN youth look to their culture for preventive measures is key. AI/AN spirituality, family, respect for elders, ceremonial rituals, oral traditions, tribal identity, and traditional healing practices are protective factors for positive outcomes (LaFromboise, 2006).

AI/AN communities are taking back their power to prevent the most widely used substance, alcohol, landing in the hands of those who matter the most, their children. These strategies range from banning alcohol on tribal land to finding ways to block alcohol sales in nearby towns. Alcohol problems with Native communities can be reduced and prevented through tribal policies to regulate the sale and use of alcohol in their communities. Engaging the whole community is needed for holistic prevention to help Native youth be healthy spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Binge Drinking Among Native Populations



24.1% of American Indians and Alaska Natives age 12 and older reported binge drinking alcohol in 2015

Source: SAMHSA



A new study reassessing the findings of previous research on moderate alcohol consumption found that health risks begin with lower consumption rates than previously thought. For women, the risks of dying prematurely increase significantly if they drink just **25 grams** of alcohol a day.

That's less than two standard cocktails containing 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits, two 12-ounce beers or two 5-ounce glasses of wine.



The risks to men increase significantly at **45 grams** of alcohol a day, or just over three drinks.



Source: New York Times; Zhao et al.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2802963>

# Test Your Alcohol Knowledge!

## 1. What is the best way to sober up?

- A. Taking a cold shower
- B. Drinking coffee
- C. Time
- D. Exercising

C. Time. Your body metabolizes alcohol over time through the liver.

## 2. Alcohol helps you get a good night sleep.

- A. True
- B. False

B. False. While alcohol is a depressant and may help you fall asleep faster, it disrupts your sleep.

## 3. What is one standard drink?

- A. 12 oz of beer
- B. 5 oz of wine
- C. 1 shot of liquor
- D. All the above

D. All the above. Each one has approximately the same amount of alcohol.

## 4. How long does it take your body to metabolize one drink?

- A. 10 minutes per drink
- B. 30 minutes per drink
- C. 1 hour per drink
- D. 2 hours per drink

C. 1 hour per drink. It takes your body about an hour to metabolize one standard drink.

## References

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## Alcohol Awareness Resources

### Youtube Videos

<https://youtu.be/Qi0SmPoxuOY>

<https://youtu.be/yZqIXW2CvCM>

<https://youtu.be/dBNrmmwZKOE>

### Remember Our Loved Ones

<https://www.rememberolo.org/>

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