



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Keep alcohol away from children

Be responsible for keeping alcohol out of sight and out of reach of children

It is dangerous and illegal to allow young children to drink alcohol, even in your own home. A small quantity of alcohol could be lethal for a young child.

How your alcohol use could affect your child

- Role model – Remember children like to copy adult behaviour.
- Behaviour – A drunken parent or carer is not fun for a child.
- Children find it frightening to see adults unable to control their actions.
- Accidents at home – Alcohol slows your reactions. This could affect how you react to your children's needs in emergencies or when they are ill.
- Driving – You can still be over the limit the morning after drinking. Think before you drive. It takes about 1 hour for your body to rid itself of 1 unit of alcohol.
- Pregnancy – It is not known how much alcohol, if any, is safe for the foetus.
- Experts are still unsure exactly how much – if any – alcohol is completely safe for you to have while you're pregnant, so the safest approach is not to drink at all while you're expecting.

What can you do to reduce the risk to children?

Children like to experiment with taste and put things in their mouth, especially if they are copying something they have seen adults do. It is common for children to go around the house, pub or party and finish off leftover drinks, or taste from bottles or cans in the fridge.

- Store all alcohol out of reach and sight of children.
- Dispose of all unfinished drinks before you go to bed / leave a room.

- Be careful when storing drinks like alcopops – they look similar to a soft drink yet each alcopop is at least 1.4 units.
- Ensure anyone looking after your children does not drink whilst caring for them.
- Ensure a non-drinking adult is available to care for your child if you plan to drink heavily.
- Ensure that your children are properly supervised while on licensed premises. Children may hear or see unsuitable behaviour (e.g. offensive language, violence/aggression or sexual behaviour), could wander off or be exposed to unwanted attention from strangers.
- Never transfer alcohol into unmarked bottles.
- Never drive after drinking, including the morning after a heavy session.

Signs of alcohol poisoning in children

Alcohol works on the brain areas that control breathing, heartbeat and consciousness. Alcohol can ‘turn off’ these vital brain areas, resulting first in coma and then death.

- 1st stage: child shows mood swings from excitable and aggressive to cheerful, exaggerated laughing
- 2nd stage: child seems slow, breathing and heartbeat irregular.
- Child has a cold sweat, feels cold, and the heartbeat is soft or may stop. Child may have fits.

Emergency action

If you think a child has consumed alcohol:

- **Phone for an ambulance to get the child to the nearest Emergency Department (A&E) as soon as possible.**
- **Inform the medical professionals what the child has consumed, how much, and how quickly (show them the can/ bottle if possible).**

- **Do not try and make the child sick.**
- **Do not try to make the child drink if they are drowsy or you are unable to rouse them.**
- **If the child is unconscious lay them on their side in the ‘recovery position’ to make their breathing easier and to prevent them inhaling vomit if they are sick.**

Useful contact numbers

- Alcohol Concern – 0207 928 7377
- Alcoholics Anonymous – 0845 7697555
- West Berkshire Drugs & Alcohol Action Team – 0800 028 6665
- NHS 111
- Drinkline – 0800 9178282

Further information

- <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/drinking-alcohol-while-pregnant/>
- <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/alcohol-and-pregnancy/>
- www.downyourdrink.org.uk
- www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

J Pendennis, Substance Specialist MW, May 2011

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