

## *Underage Drinking: What Parents Should Know*

### *Key Messages*

- ※ Underage drinking is a public health concern. While alcohol drinking is particularly harmful to children's developing brain, early initiation of drinking is an important risk factor for alcohol dependency and various alcohol-related chronic diseases later in life. With drinking, there is also an increased risk of acute intoxication, violence, injuries and unsafe or risky sexual behaviours.
- ※ Parental drinking attitudes and behaviours towards drinking are significant factors influencing when and how adolescents initiate and maintain the use of alcohol.
- ※ As parents, they have a critical role in influencing —for better or worse— children's behaviour with regard to alcohol use. Under no circumstance should parents (and adults) let children and adolescents drink, give children and adolescents alcohol or pressure them to drink. With parental guidance along with community support, children can safely navigate adolescence free of alcohol problems.
- ※ For more information about alcohol effects on young people and parental tips on setting a healthy alcohol-free life for children and adolescents, please visit [http://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/alcohol\\_aware/youngandalcoholfree/index.html](http://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/alcohol_aware/youngandalcoholfree/index.html).



## Underage Drinking: What Parents Should Know

Underage drinking is a public health concern. Among adolescents aged 15-19 years, the Global Burden of Disease Study reported that alcohol use was the leading global risk factor for death as well as loss of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) (i.e. the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability and early death) in 2013. For those aged 10-14 years, it ranked fifth and seventh respectively.<sup>1</sup> In fact, research findings have clearly informed us that adolescence is a critical period with regard to the initiation and early escalation of alcohol use.

While alcohol drinking is particularly harmful to adolescents' developing brain, early initiation of drinking is an important risk factor for alcohol dependency and various alcohol-related chronic diseases later in life. Underage drinking has immediate consequences too. With drinking, there is an increased risk of acute intoxication, violence, injuries and unsafe or risky sexual behaviours that often require acute medical care and hospitalisation.<sup>2</sup> In Hong Kong, a survey of about 33 300 secondary students (mean age 14.6 years) in 2003/04 reported that underage alcohol drinking was significantly associated with use of medical services. Compared with non-drinking students, students who drank less than 1 day per week, 1-2 days a week and 3-7 days a week had 14%, 30% and 70% increased risk for medical consultation respectively. The corresponding risks for hospitalisation were 14%, 68% and 138% higher.<sup>3</sup>

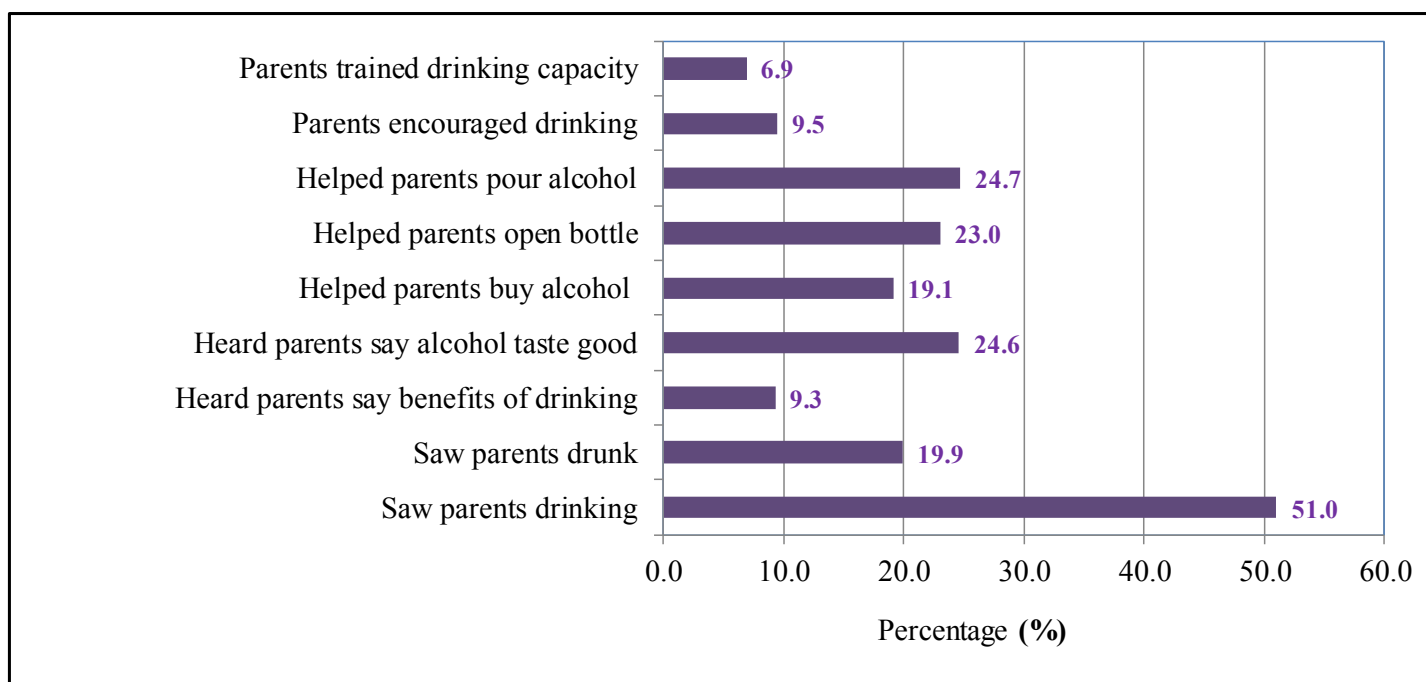
### Parental pro-drinking practices encourage their children to drink

Other than being exposed to community influences (such as various advertisements for alcohol or easy access and availability of alcohol to young people) and peer effects, parental modeling of

alcohol drinking (whether for recreational or coping purposes) is also a significant factor influencing when and how adolescents initiate and maintain the use of alcohol.<sup>2</sup> In direct ways, parents can also influence children's behaviour by offering and supplying alcohol to their children (e.g. offer sips and tastes at dinner or in special occasions; offer to purchase alcohol; or supply alcohol for an adolescent party) or allowing their children to drink in the home (either supervised or unsupervised). Indirectly, parents can influence adolescent alcohol use by having permissive attitudes or expressing approval towards underage drinking, or simply by providing unguarded access to alcohol at home.<sup>4</sup>

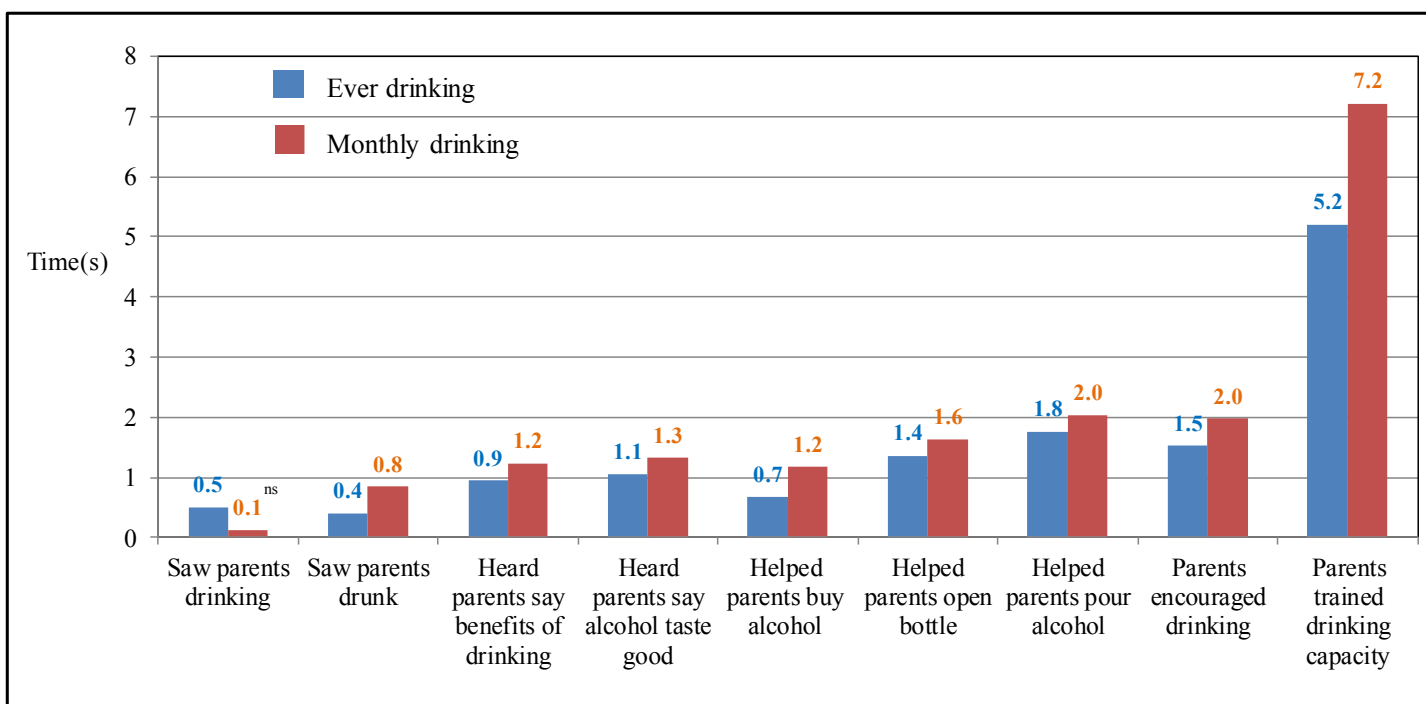
In Hong Kong, a local study in 2012 revealed that exposure to parental pro-drinking practices was substantially common among Chinese adolescents. Among a random sample of over 1 700 secondary students (mean age 14.7 years), 67.5% of them reported being exposed to at least one parental pro-drinking practice. Saw parent drinking (51.0%) was the most common parental pro-drinking practice, followed by helped parents pour alcohol (24.7%), heard parents say alcohol tastes good (24.6%) and helped parents open bottle (23.0%) (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> The study also observed that each parental pro-drinking practice was significantly associated with adolescent ever drinking and monthly drinking, except for the association between seeing parent drinking and adolescent monthly drinking. Among all the practices, parental training of drinking capacity was most strongly associated with drinking in adolescents. Compared with non-exposed students, students exposed to drinking capacity training were about 5 times and 7 times more likely to report ever drinking and monthly drinking respectively (Figure 2).<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1: Prevalence of parental pro-drinking practices**



Source: Au et al 2014.

**Figure 2: Increased risks of adolescent drinking by parental pro-drinking practices**



Note: <sup>ns</sup> The association of parental pro-drinking practices with adolescent drinking is statistically insignificant.

Source: Au et al 2016.

## Set a Healthy Alcohol-free Life for Children and Adolescents

Fostering a healthy environment for children and adolescents to grow and develop well is every adult's business. However, children and adolescents today live in a world where alcohol or "alcopop" (Box 1) is regularly promoted and consumed. While some parents misbelieve that letting children sip or drink alcohol under supervision can inoculate them from problem drinking later in life, others may underestimate their children's drinking.

As parents, they have a critical role in influencing—for better or worse—children's behaviour with regard to alcohol drinking. Under no circumstance should parents (and adults) let children and adolescents drink, give children and adolescents alcohol or pressure them to drink. Be a role model and do not drink alcohol in front of children.

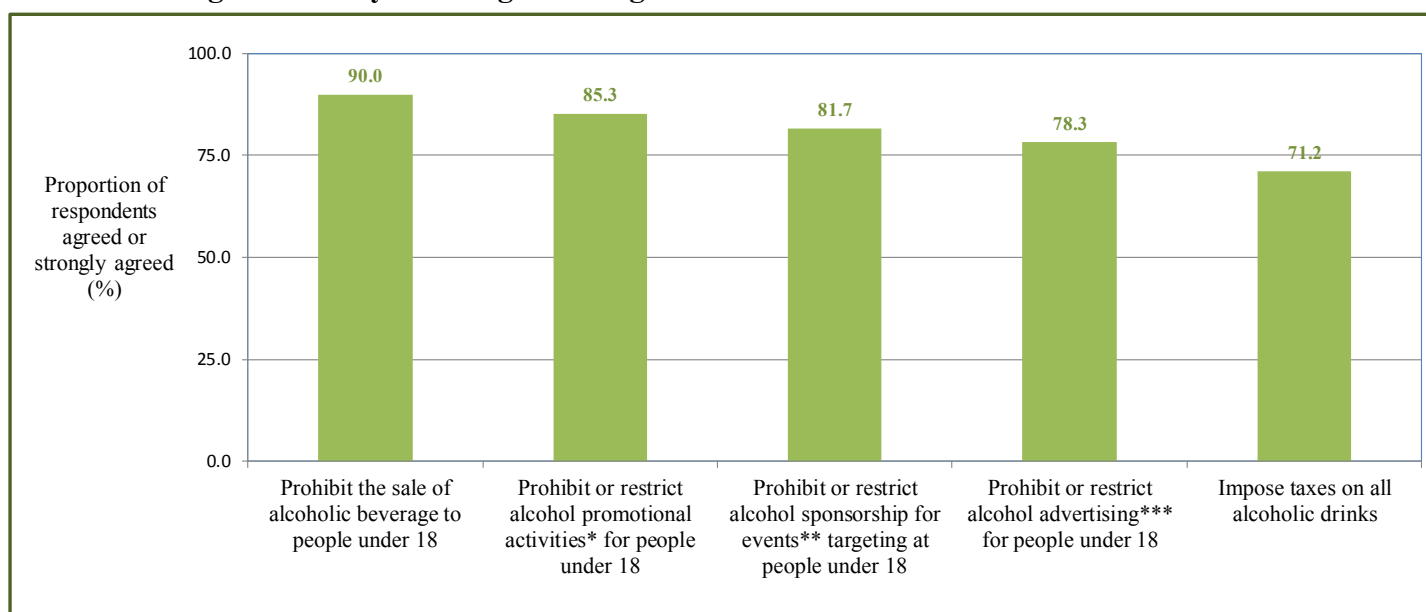
### **Box 1: ALCOPOPs - Sweet Danger<sup>7</sup>**

- ◆ Alcopops are sweet-tasting, pre-mixed alcohol-based drinks which usually contain similar amounts of alcohol as beer (about 4-7%) but can contain up to 8-12% of alcohol content, and sold in bottles or cans that resemble soft drinks.
- ◆ Studies indicate that alcopops are preferred by girls. The sweet flavour is considered particularly attractive to girls to embark on drinking.
- ◆ Adolescents commonly underestimate the alcoholic content of alcopops as it is masked by sweetness and flavouring.
- ◆ Adolescents mistakenly do not consider alcopops consumption can cause health problems or alcohol intoxication.

Parents should also discuss more alcohol-related problems with children to understand their attitudes towards drinking and reduce their curiosity. While setting family rules with children about no alcohol use, parents should let children understand they should not feel compelled to drink and empower them to say NO to alcohol with some refusal techniques when offered an alcohol drink (such as find an ally to back them up, give an excuse in order to get out of situations, turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the invitation).

To reduce alcohol consumption and related harm, the World Health Organization advocates three best buys: restricting access to retailed alcohol, restricting or banning alcohol advertising, and increasing alcohol beverage excise taxes.<sup>8</sup> In Hong Kong, the Department of Health (DH) conducted a study in 2015 and telephone-interviewed over 2 500 community-dwelling adults aged 18-64 to examine the public's knowledge, attitudes and practices pertaining to alcohol consumption, including their views towards restrictive alcohol policy measures.<sup>9</sup> Results showed that 90% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages to people under 18; about four-fifths of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to prohibit or restrict alcohol promotional activities (85.3%), alcohol sponsorship events (81.7%) or alcohol advertising (78.3%) targeting people under 18; and 71.2% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to impose taxes on all alcoholic drinks (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Attitudes towards limiting access to alcohol, regulation of alcohol marketing and alcohol taxation among community-dwelling adults aged 18-64**



Notes: \* Examples include wine tasting classes and wine expo, etc; \*\* Examples include musical events, sporting events and student activities, etc; \*\*\* Examples include advertising on TV or radio, social media sites such as Facebook, and in cinema before movies, etc.

Source: Department of Health.

Remember, underage drinking can lead to serious and life-long consequences and reducing underage drinking is a collective responsibility. To protect young people from alcohol-related harm, the Government is considering the use of legal instruments to restrict the sale of alcoholic beverages by retail shops to people aged under 18. DH will continue the work to strengthen public literacy about harmful effects of drinking especially on children and adolescents, and appeal to schools, institutions and organisations which are concerned about young people for joint efforts in creating an alcohol-free environment. With parental guidance and community support, children can safely navigate adolescence free of alcohol problems. For more information about “Young and Alcohol Free”, please visit [http://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/alcohol\\_aware/youngandalcoholfree/index.html](http://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/alcohol_aware/youngandalcoholfree/index.html).

## References

1. Mokdad AH, Forouzanfar MH, Daoud F, et al. Global burden of diseases, injuries, and risk factors for young people's health during 1990-2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013. *Lancet* 2016; 387(10036):2383-401.
2. Young People and Alcohol. A Resource Book. Geneva: World Health Organization Western Pacific Region, 2015.
3. Wang MP, Ho SY, Lam TH. Underage alcohol drinking and medical services use in Hong Kong: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open* 2013; 3(5).
4. Kaynak O, Winters KC, Cacciola J, et al. Providing alcohol for underage youth: what messages should we be sending parents? *J Stud Alcohol Drugs* 2014; 75(4):590-605.
5. Au WM, Ho SY, Wang MP, et al. Alcohol drinking and pro-drinking practices in parents of Hong Kong adolescents. *Alcohol Alcohol* 2014; 49(6):668-74.
6. Au WM, Ho SY, Wang MP, et al. Cross-sectional study on parental pro-drinking practices and adolescent alcohol drinking in Hong Kong. *BMJ Open* 2016; 6(2):e009804.
7. Metzner C, Kraus L. The impact of alcopops on adolescent drinking: a literature review. *Alcohol Alcohol* 2008; 43(2):230-9.
8. Discussion paper. In: WHO First Global Ministerial conference on Healthy Lifestyles and NCD Control, Moscow, 28-29 April 2011. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2011.
9. Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) Study Pertaining to Alcohol Consumption among Adults in Hong Kong 2015. Hong Kong SAR: Department of Health.



## “Young and Alcohol Free” Animated GIF Design Contest Hong Kong



The Department of Health is hosting the “Young and Alcohol Free” Animated GIF Design Contest Hong Kong for secondary and primary students to explore their creativity through social media platforms. The contest aims to increase young people’s awareness of alcohol-related harm; to lead an alcohol free lifestyle and to empower them to refuse drinking. Family Category of the contest also provides an opportunity for parents to discuss the harm from alcohol drinking with their children, strengthening their key roles in stopping underage drinking thereby protecting young people from alcohol harm.

Entry Categories:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family Category — 2 to 3 participants in each entry with at least 1 primary student and 1 parent</li> <li>2. Secondary School Category — 1 to 3 secondary students per entry</li> </ol>
Themes:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Young and Alcohol Free</li> <li>2. Say No to Alcohol</li> <li>3. Enjoy a Healthy Lifestyle</li> </ol>
Submission Deadline:	23:59 on 15 April 2017

Entries must be submitted by email **from 1 March to 15 April 2017** to [ncdd@dh.gov.hk](mailto:ncdd@dh.gov.hk). Please state “Young and Alcohol Free” Animated GIF Design Contest Hong Kong in the email subject line.

For more details, please visit: <http://www.change4health.gov.hk/gifcontest> or follow [www.instagram.com/youngandalcoholfree](http://www.instagram.com/youngandalcoholfree).

**Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) WATCH** is dedicated to promote public’s awareness of and disseminate health information about non-communicable diseases and related issues, and the importance of their prevention and control. It is also an indication of our commitments in responsive risk communication and to address the growing non-communicable disease threats to the health of our community. The Editorial Board welcomes your views and comments. Please send all comments and/or questions to [so\\_dp3@dh.gov.hk](mailto:so_dp3@dh.gov.hk).

### Editor-in-Chief

Dr Regina CHING

### Members

Dr Thomas CHUNG	Dr Ruby LEE
Dr Cecilia FAN	Mr YH LEE
Dr Anne FUNG	Dr Albert NG
Ms Janice HO	Dr Eddy NG
Dr Rita HO	Dr Lilian WAN
Dr Karen LEE	Dr Monica WONG