

## Consultation on Children, Young People and Alcohol

Over the last few years, **the way that young people drink has been changing** and we are beginning to learn more about the risks associated with children, young people and alcohol – that it impairs their well-being, puts them at a number of immediate risks, and can impact on their health and future prospects.

Although fewer children and young people are choosing to drink at all, those that do are drinking more, more often, and starting at a younger age. The most common drinks that young people now consume are those that are cheaper and higher in alcohol content, such as spirits and alcopops. More young people are drinking outside in public places, such as parks and the high street. This type of unsupervised drinking is clearly linked with putting young people at immediate risk of ending up in hospital, having unsafe sex, being injured or getting involved in violent crime or anti-social behaviour.

Young people are harming themselves in the long term by drinking too much too often, and this is becoming ‘the norm’ among some groups, such as the 15% of 11–15-year-olds who usually drink at least once a week. They are putting themselves at a greater risk of liver damage, problems with brain development and memory, and depression. This is a serious issue, with more than 10,000 young people every year ending up in hospital due to drinking, as a result of acute alcohol poisoning or an alcohol-related accident.

**We want to reduce the damage** that young people, families and the community experience as a result of youth drinking, which is why we launched the Youth Alcohol Action Plan last year to stop the problem of young people drinking in public places, and to work in partnership with the alcohol retail industry to continue to tackle instances of underage sales.

In order to help young people to make sensible decision about drinking, and to support parents to protect their children from the harms associated with early alcohol use, we asked the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to produce clear health **Guidance**. This work has been done and we are supporting this with **Advice and Information** to help parents and young people to understand and use the Guidance.

This is important, because the most common source of alcohol for young people is from their parents; young people learn their attitudes and drinking behaviour from parents; and parents have the greatest influence over protecting their children from alcohol related harm.

Those aged under 18 are not adults, but children and young people whose developing brains and bodies are more susceptible to damage from drinking, putting them at increased risk from what may seem like fairly small amounts of alcohol for an adult. We should all look at the way in which young people drink and ask ourselves the question, “Is it safe for them to do this?”

Parents raise children; government does not. However, **parents and young people have asked for a clear message** on the health effects of alcohol consumption on young people

and what the boundaries should be on when and how children should be introduced to alcohol, and have asked for more information on which to base their decisions and choices.

**This consultation** is based on two documents that are aimed at reaching all parents, children and young people under 18 as well as health, education and children's services professionals:

- the **Chief Medical Officer's Guidance** on the consumption of alcohol by children and young people; and
- our initial ideas for the supporting **Advice and Information** for parents and young people.

**This is your opportunity to get involved**, shape the messages that will go to parents and young people, and have your say on how they will be delivered. You can have an influence on how this campaign develops. We do not have all the answers, which is why we want to hear your thoughts and comments so that you can help to make this a success.