# Propose a Toast

## Ensure a safe and healthy holiday season by monitoring alcohol consumption at parties

By **BRENDA HEITHOFF**
Health View Editor

With the holiday season in full swing, many of us will be hosting and attending parties with our friends, family members and co-workers over the next several weeks to celebrate. Since alcohol is often served at these gatherings, it's a good time to review the potential dangers of alcohol consumption to ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable holiday season, says Christy Jenkins, prevention specialist at New Opportunities in Carroll.

"Alcohol dependency and abuse are major public health problems carrying a large economic cost," stated Jenkins. "In fact, excessive alcohol use is the third leading lifestyle-related cause of death for people in the United States each year."

She continued: "Several million adults engage in risky drinking that could lead to alcohol problems. These patterns include binge drinking — drinking too much at one time — and chronic heavy drinking — drinking a large quantity of alcohol on a regular basis."

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, if you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation, which is defined as no more than 1 standard drink per day for women and no more than 2 standard drinks per day for men.

A standard drink is equal to 14.0 grams (0.6 ounces) of pure alcohol. Generally, this amount of pure alcohol is found in:

— 12 ounces of beer.
— 8 ounces of malt liquor
— 5 ounces of wine
— 1.5 ounces or a "shot" of 80-proof distilled spirits or liquor (for example, gin, rum, vodka, or whiskey).

Jenkins said excessive drinking includes heavy drinking, binge drinking, and any drinking by pregnant women or underage youth.

Heavy drinking is defined as consuming:

— For women, more than 1 drink per day on average.

— For men, more than 2 drinks per day on average.

Binge drinking, the most common form of excessive alcohol consumption, is defined as consuming:

— For women, 4 or more drinks during a single occasion.

— For men, 5 or more drinks during a single occasion.

"Among all adult Iowans, 23.1 percent reported at least one binge episode in the last 30 days," said Jenkins, pointing to the 2011 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System as her source. "There are only three states with a higher prevalence of reported binge drinking than Iowa."

New Opportunities offers the following reminders that will assist you in having a safe and enjoyable holiday party:

— Control access to the al-

See **ALCOHOL**, Page 22

Controlling access to the alcohol you provide is one way to keep guests safe during your next holiday party, says Christy Jenkins, prevention specialist at New Opportunities in Carroll.


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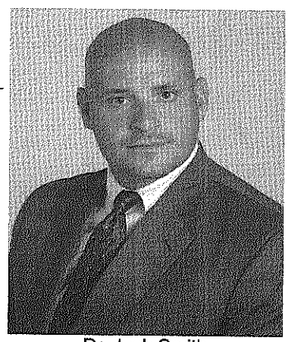
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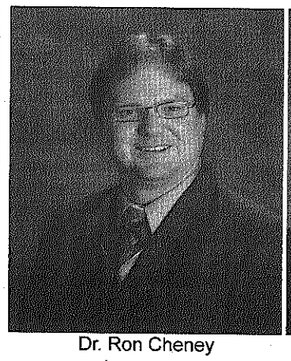
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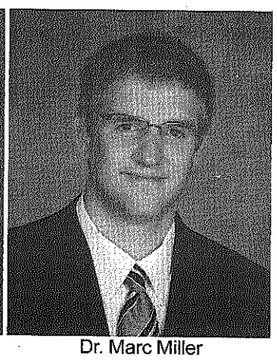
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**EXERCISE**, from Page **20**

cohol you provide.

— Avoid serving from common sources, such as kegs or punch bowls.

— Consider hiring a trained professional to serve drinks at your party.

— Be sure that whoever does pour the drinks is not consuming alcohol and monitors other guests' consumption.

— Offer soft drinks, fruit juices, bottled water and coffee so that your guests have an alternative to alcohol.

— Allow guests to have only one drink at a time. Discourage competitive or rapid drinking.

— Provide plenty of appetizers, snacks and other food.

— Plan entertainment and other activities so that drinking alcohol is not the primary focus of the party.

— Request identification from anyone who appears 30 years of age or younger. Guests who cannot present a valid form of ID should not be given any alcohol.

— Model appropriate behavior for your guests and be sure to communicate that becoming intoxicated is unacceptable.

— Stop serving alcohol beverages at least one hour before the party ends. Encourage guests to stay for a while and enjoy a soda or coffee.

— Make sure anyone who is visibly intoxicated does not receive any more alcohol and is not left alone. Even if the guest is not driving, an impaired guest can be injured or injure others in many ways, not just in a car.

— When necessary, provide alternate transportation for impaired guests. Either call a cab, or enlist the help of sober friends to take the impaired guest home.

Adults are not the only ones at risk when alcohol is served at a holiday party, reminded Jenkins. "Anytime alcohol is present there is potential for individuals to drink underage, and holiday parties are no exception."

If you are hosting a gathering where alcohol is available, consider the following guidelines to help prevent minors from gaining access:

— Be clear about your rules around alcohol (and enforce those rules consistently and with appropriate consequences).

— Store alcohol in a place where it can be easily and constantly monitored.

— Keep track of individual drinks (don't leave them sitting unattended).

— Provide supervision and alcohol-free activity options and areas for youth.

However, the biggest deterrent to underage drinking goes beyond setting boundaries for one-time events, such as holiday parties or other celebrations, said Jenkins. Talking early and often with your child is one of the most important things you can do. She recommended the following resource for parents: www.theparenttoolkit.org.

According to the 2012 Iowa Youth Survey, the most recent survey compiled by the Iowa Department of Public Health, 10 percent of Carroll County 11th graders (down from 39 percent in 2010) reported drinking alcohol and 13 percent (down from 34 percent in 2010) reported engaging in binge drinking in a 30-day period.

"We need to continue our good efforts in not providing alcohol to minors," Jenkins said.

Excessive alcohol use has immediate effects that increase the risk of many harmful health conditions, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These immediate effects are most often the result of binge drinking and include the following:

— Unintentional injuries, including traffic injuries, falls, drownings, burns and unintentional firearm injuries.

— Violence, including intimate partner violence and child maltreatment.

— Risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex, sex with multiple partners and increased risk of sexual assault. These behaviors can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.

— Miscarriage and stillbirth among pregnant women, and a combination of physical and mental birth defects among children that last throughout life.

— Alcohol poisoning, a medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels that suppress the central nervous system and can cause loss of consciousness, low blood pressure and body temperature, coma, respiratory depression, or death.

Over time, excessive alcohol use can lead to the development of chronic diseases, neurological impairments and social problems. These include but are not limited to:

— Neurological problems, including dementia, stroke and neuropathy.

— Cardiovascular problems, including myocardial infarction, cardiomyopathy, atrial fibrillation and hypertension.

— Psychiatric problems, including depression, anxiety and suicide.

— Social problems, including unemployment, lost productivity and family problems.

— Cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, colon and breast. In general, the risk of cancer increases with increasing amounts of alcohol.

— Liver diseases, including, alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis, which is among the 15 leading causes of all deaths in the United States.

— Other gastrointestinal problems, including pancreatitis and gastritis.

For more information, contact New Opportunities Prevention Department at (712) 792-9266 or cjenkins@newopp.org.

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