

Substance use Harm Reduction Tips for Youth

The safest way to avoid harm from alcohol and other drugs is to not use them. If you choose to use, it's important to know the risk to keep you and your friends safe:

Know the Risks

Today's unregulated drug supply is more unpredictable than ever. A substance may contain unexpected ingredients or be much stronger than expected even if it looks the same as before.



Drug Checking Has Limits

Drug checking tools can reduce risk, but they cannot detect every substance or identify every harmful combination. A negative result does not guarantee a substance is safe.

Naloxone Saves Lives but It Doesn't Work for Every Drug

Naloxone can temporarily reverse **opioid overdoses** (such as fentanyl, heroin, morphine, oxycodone, hydromorphone, codeine). Naloxone **only** works with opioids. It does not reverse overdoses caused by alcohol, cocaine, methamphetamine, MDMA, or benzodiazepines (e.g., Xanax® or Ativan®).



If you think someone is overdosing, call 911 and give naloxone if it is available. If opioids aren't involved, naloxone won't cause harm. If they are, it could save a life.

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If you choose to use alcohol or other drugs, these tips may help reduce risk.

Substance Use Harm Reduction Tips for Youth

The safest way to avoid harm from alcohol and other drugs is to not use them. If you choose to use, it's important to know the risk to keep you and your friends safe:



Plan ahead and be prepared

Alcohol and other drugs may reduce your inhibitions (ex. driving or engaging in sexual activity).



Avoid Mixing

Combining substances increases risk (For example: mixing alcohol and cannabis).



Look out for friends

Don't use alone. Stay with friends, share your location, and make sure everyone gets home safely.



Know what you're taking

You can never be sure what's in your substance. Avoid unknown pills or substances.



Use less, less often



Regular use can affect your physical and mental health. Try to space out your use and limit how much you take.

Hydrate, Eat, Rest

Drink water before, during, and after. Eat before to reduce unwanted effects. Allow time to rest and recover between use.



Be emergency ready

Know the local emergency numbers. If you suspect an overdose, call for help and use naloxone if available.



Start low and go slow

Take a small amount to see how it affects you. Smaller doses reduce the risk of overdose and other harms.



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References

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