**Binge Drinking:  Dangerous At Any Age**

Tragically, in the United States an average of six people die each day of alcohol poisoning.  Alcohol poisoning is caused by drinking large quantities of alcohol in a short period of time.  Very high levels of alcohol in the body can shut down critical areas of the brain that control breathing, heart rate, and body temperature, resulting in death.  Alcohol poisoning deaths affect people of all ages but are most common among middle-aged adults.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) scientists analyzed deaths from alcohol poisoning among people aged 15 years and older, using multiple cause-of-death data from the National Vital Statistics System for 2010-2012.  Alcohol dependence (alcoholism) was identified as a contributing factor in 30 percent of these deaths, and other drugs were noted to have been a factor in about three percent of the deaths.  While this study reveals that alcohol poisoning deaths are a bigger problem than previously thought, it is still likely to be an underestimate of actual incidence.

Despite the risks, more than 38 million U.S. adults report binge drinking an average of four times per month and consume an average of eight drinks per binge.  Binge drinking is defined as consuming four or more drinks for women and five or more drinks for men on one occasion.  Binge drinking typically leads to a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) that exceeds 0.08 g/dL, the legal limit for driving in all states. U.S. adults who binge drink consume an average of about 8 drinks per binge, which can result in even higher levels of alcohol in the body. The more a person drinks, the greater the risk of death.

Binge drinking is not just an “adult” problem.  Nationwide, 15.9 percent of youth aged 12 to 20 were binge drinkers in the 30 days prior to being surveyed

Binge drinking can be dangerous at any age.  Key findings of a CDC Vital Signs Report indicate there are more than 2,200 alcohol-poisoning deaths in the U.S. each year—an average of 6 alcohol poisoning deaths every day. It is harmful because of the potential serious consequences, and people who binge on a regular basis are at even higher risk.  Since young people frequently combine high-risk activities with binge drinking, their potential for death or serious injury is very high.  Medical research has also proven that because the teen brain is still developing, underage drinking can cause permanent damage.

We can take steps to reduce alcohol-poisoning deaths by preventing binge drinking.  If you choose to drink alcohol, follow the dietary guidelines.  Avoid drinks with unknown alcohol content or mixing alcohol with energy drinks.  Caffeine can mask alcohol’s effects and cause people to drink more than they intend.  Get immediate help for anyone experiencing life-threatening signs of alcohol poisoning.  Talk with your doctor, nurse, or other health care provider if you think you may have a drinking problem, or call the Fayette County Prevention Coalition at 740-335-7282 ext. 131.