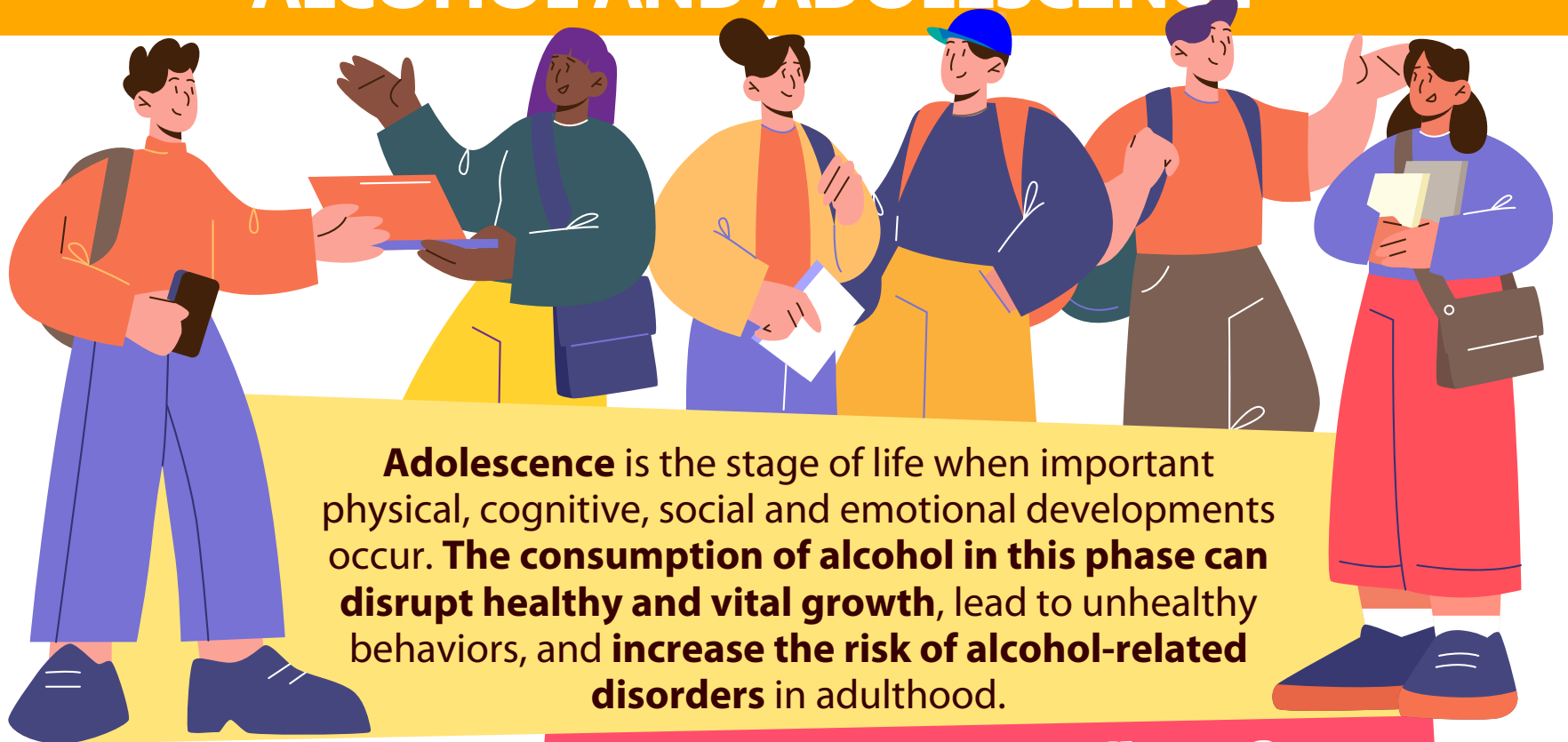


ALCOHOL AND ADOLESCENCE



Adolescence is the stage of life when important physical, cognitive, social and emotional developments occur. **The consumption of alcohol in this phase can disrupt healthy and vital growth**, lead to unhealthy behaviors, and **increase the risk of alcohol-related disorders** in adulthood.

Factors that can influence adolescent drinking



Alcohol consumption by young people in the Americas

- In 2016, around 38% of the general population aged between 15–19 years drank alcohol in the previous year and 18.5% were heavy episodic alcohol drinkers (1).
- In 14 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, most adolescents had their first alcoholic drink before the age of 14 years. Young people most often obtained alcohol from home and/or family members or from their friends (2).



A variety of factors can affect alcohol use among adolescents, including genetics, personality, socioeconomic status, beliefs about alcohol, social and environmental factors. For example:



Parenting factors (e.g., having alcohol accessible at home, limited parental supervision, absence of alcohol-specific rules) and **peer attitudes and behaviors towards alcoholic beverages** can have a strong social influence on alcohol use among adolescents (3).



Young people's **exposure to alcohol advertisements and promotions** increases the chances of early alcohol use initiation and progression to regular consumption (2, 5).



Liking and sharing alcohol advertisements and downloading alcohol-branded content on social media can influence alcohol consumption (5).

The low price and easy commercial or public availability of alcoholic beverages impact consumption among adolescents.

Mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, may contribute to the likelihood of alcohol use in adolescence and vice-versa (4).



ALCOHOL AND ADOLESCENCE



Adolescents are vulnerable to the effects of alcohol



Early alcohol drinking initiation may shape drinking patterns into adulthood. Drinking before the age of 15 years (1) and engaging in heavy drinking during adolescence (6) increase the risks of having alcohol or other drug use disorders later in life.

Alcohol consumption during adolescence can negatively affect brain development, the ability to form healthy relationships, and having a healthy lifestyle. It can result in poorer school performance and engaging in risky sexual behaviors (1, 4). It is important to note that the brain continues its development until a person is in their mid-twenties.



Young people who start drinking early and drink frequently are at an increased risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence. Alcohol use can reduce self-control and the ability to assess risks.

Children and adolescents who experience or witness violence can have an increased risk of alcohol use problems later life. In addition, children of parents who use alcohol in harmful ways are at elevated risk of antisocial behavior, including violence (7).

Alcohol consumption by young people is also strongly associated with **traffic injuries**, suicide attempts and death by suicide.

Key recommendations

- 1.** Adolescents should not drink alcoholic beverages at all. To prevent alcohol-related harms and alcohol use disorders in adulthood, it is pivotal to delay initiation.
- 2.** Parents and caregivers should implement and monitor alcohol-specific rules to reduce the risk of early initiation, early onset of heavy drinking and alcohol-related harms. Parents and other family members should not encourage initiation into alcohol drinking. Adults

should be role models; if they drink, they should not condone intoxication.

- 3.** Governments have a central role in the implementation of population-based, high-impact policies to limit all forms of marketing, implement health taxes and limit the physical availability of alcohol, as well as to strengthen collaboration with different sectors to protect children and adolescents from alcohol use and its related harms.

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