

Groups Join to Curb Underage Drinking

The AMA has joined a coalition of health and safety groups that are working to preserve the minimum legal drinking age at 21.

"As physicians, we know all too well the dangers of early alcohol use for children and adolescents," said AMA President Ron Davis, MD, at an Oct. 9 briefing announcing the new coalition.

Not only is alcohol a leading contributor to the main cause of death and injury for those younger than age 21, but young users of alcohol are at risk of damaging two key areas of the brain, the hippocampus, which manages the learning and memory processes; and the prefrontal area, which plays an important role in the formation of adult personality and behavior, Dr. Davis said.

Young drinkers are more in danger of developing high blood pressure and cirrhosis of the liver in adulthood, he noted. "We see the impact of alcohol one patient at a time. But the collective damage to our children that is caused by alcohol is staggering."

The other coalition members include Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the National Transportation Safety Board and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

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