New Alcohol Screening Guide for Youth

A new screening guide has been released to help health professionals assess alcohol use in children and adolescents. The guide, developed by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and other healthcare and research professionals, includes just two questions and can be used to screen young people for risk for alcohol-related problems.

The content of the guide is based on analyses of data on underage drinking by a working group of researchers assembled by NIAAA. Beginning to drink prior to age 15 is related to an increased risk of alcohol problems in adulthood. Alcohol use also is associated with unintentional injuries, the leading cause of death in adolescents in the 15-19 age range (CDC, 2008).

The two-question screener could be used by pediatricians or other health professionals in the context of an annual examination or an acute care visit. The items focus on drinking by friends as well as on the patient’s own drinking. Questions are worded differently depending on age group (elementary school, middle school, or high school). The middle school screening questions are:

“Do you have any friends who drank beer, wine, or any drink containing alcohol in the past year?”

“How about you—in the past year, on how many days have you had more than a few sips of beer, wine, or any drink containing alcohol?”

The guide also includes indicators of risk based on responses and age group as well as information on possible interventions. For instance, for 9-11 year olds, responses indicating that any friends drink is a cause for concern while, for high school students,
having friends involved in binge drinking causes increased concern. The guide also addresses possible interventions and confidentiality concerns surrounding treatment of these problems in minors. The screening guide and a companion pocket guide are available on the NIAAA website, www.niaaa.nih.gov.

References:


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