



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Vermont Department of Health Encouraging Providers to Screen for Alcohol Abuse



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BURLINGTON – Only 9 percent of Vermont adults in the past year were asked by a doctor, nurse or health care professional about their alcohol use. This is far less than the national average of one in six reported in January 2014 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/VitalSigns.

The CDC report shows that alcohol screening and brief counseling can reduce the amount of alcohol consumed – on one occasion – by 25 percent for those who drink too much.

High risk drinking is a public health problem in Vermont. Half of all young adults age 18 to 24 drink to excess. The Health Department hopes to educate health care professionals about the importance of asking adults about drinking habits and behaviors as part of a regular checkup or appointment.

“The majority of Vermonters who drink too much are not alcoholics,” said Barbara Cimaglio, deputy health commissioner. “Over time, binge drinking disrupts lives and leads to life-threatening health conditions: liver disease, certain cancers, heart disease, stroke and other chronic illnesses.”

Vermont's approach to the problem of high risk drinking has been to fund and support community coalitions to make local assessments and create and share local solutions. The Health Department recently received a \$9.9 million Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) grant to help medical professionals provide brief interventions to reduce the risk of substance abuse.

Vermont was one of only five states in the nation selected to receive the 2013 SBIRT U.S. Department of Health and Human Services award. The funds will be distributed through 2018 to help identify, reduce and prevent alcohol and illicit drug dependence and abuse through early screening and intervention.

Brief counseling involves using a set of questions to screen all patients for how much and how often they drink, counseling patients about the health dangers of drinking too much, and referring only those few patients who need specialized treatment for alcohol dependence.

“We anticipate 20 percent of those people who are screened will require a brief intervention and about 3 percent will be referred to treatment,” Cimaglio said. “These may seem like awkward conversations, but as a health care provider, these are important questions to ask, and it could reduce excessive drinking statewide.”

The Health Department also has a campaign called Parent Up campaign that leverages parental influence, and not wanting to disappoint a parent, as the most effective way to reduce underage drinking.

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