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Important Information for Colleges and Universities: Use of Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages by Young People

The use of caffeinated alcoholic beverages is a serious public health concern. Recent media coverage has drawn national attention to reports of emergency room visits by college students in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Washington and some colleges/universities have banned these products from their campuses.

Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages

Caffeinated alcoholic beverages (“CABs”) are premixed drinks that contain a combination of alcohol, caffeine and other stimulants. Recently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned four companies that the caffeine in their CAB products is unsafe and further action including the seizure of their products is possible. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), energy drinks (containing caffeine and other stimulants such as guarana, taurine, ginseng and choline) are regularly consumed by 34% of 18 to 24 year-olds. Mixing caffeine with alcohol is popular among young people. Combining alcohol with caffeine disguises the alcohol’s effects and contributes to impaired judgment.

What You Can Do

Your college or university can play an important role in preventing CAB-related injuries and deaths.

1. Increase your knowledge regarding CABs and their use by young people^{1,2}:
 - As many as 26% of U.S. college students consume caffeine and alcohol together.
 - There are over 25 CAB manufacturers that sell over 40 products. Current popular products include Joose® and Four Loko®.
 - The products come in soda-like cans with graphics and messages that would appeal to young people (e.g., flashy colors, extreme sports).
 - Manufacturers may use very small print to disclose alcohol content, which can be upwards of 12% (about twice the amount of a beer).
 - CABs come in flavors like grape and orange, and their cost can be as little as \$2.50 per can.
2. Increase communication inside and outside of your college or university regarding the dangers of CABs:
 - Although your students’ perception to feel intoxicated may be reduced by the caffeine in a CAB, the drink may impair the person’s judgment and reaction time related to their intoxication. This may result in students driving while intoxicated, alcohol poisoning and/or causing a serious injury to themselves or others (including sexual assault).² In addition, alcohol and caffeine are both diuretics and may cause dehydration.
 - According to the CDC, drinkers who consume alcohol with energy drinks are about three times more likely to binge drink than those who do not mix alcohol with energy drinks.¹ Binge drinking is responsible for approximately 40,000 deaths annually and is common among 18-24 year-olds.³
 - According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), alcohol abuse makes prescription drug abuse more likely. Young adults are particularly vulnerable to the combined abuse of alcohol and

prescription drugs. When alcohol and prescription drugs are used at the same time, severe medical problems can result (e.g., alcohol poisoning, losing consciousness, respiratory depression, death).⁴

3. Provide resources to your students, their parents and your educators regarding the dangers of mixing caffeine with alcohol, as well as the dangers of binge drinking:
 - “Rethinking Drinking” – This web site allows users to examine how their drinking habits affect their health. Available at: <http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/>
 - “College Drinking – Changing the Culture” – This web site provides information for students, parents and educators on issues related to alcohol abuse and binge drinking among college students. Available at: <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/>

4. Provide resources for substance use-related questions, treatment and harm reduction:
 - “New York State HOPEline” – The NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) offers a confidential hotline that provides help for drugs, alcohol and gambling. The hotline is staffed by masters-level clinicians and is available 24 hours a day. The toll-free phone number is: 1-877-8-HOPENY or 1-877-846-7369.
 - OASAS Treatment System Home Page: <http://www.oasas.state.ny.us/treatment/index.cfm#>
 - Treatment Provider Search and Directory: <http://www.oasas.state.ny.us/treatment/directory.cfm>
 - OASAS Addiction Medicine Web Page: <http://www.oasas.state.ny.us/AdMed/index.cfm>
 - Harm Reduction and Drug Use: http://health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/index.htm

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1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Fact Sheet: “Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages”. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/cab.htm>
 2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). “Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages”. Available at: <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodIngredientsPackaging/ucm190366.htm>
 3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). “Vital Signs: Binge Drinking Among High School Students and Adults – United States, 2009.” Volume 59, Number 39, October 8, 2010.
 4. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). “Alcohol Abuse Makes Prescription Drug Abuse More Likely”. Volume 21, Number 5, March 2008. Available at: http://www.nida.nih.gov/NIDA_notes/NNvol21N5/alcohol.html