

Spring Break Fun

Keeping It Safe

Do you think of yourself as a savvy parent when it comes to teen and college age partying? If so, you may want to check your reference point. Today's Spring Break scene is much different – and far more dangerous – than it was thirty years ago. Here's what's happening after the sun goes down on the beach:

Binge Drinking

From "beer bong" to shots – Spring Break for a lot of students means consuming as much alcohol as quickly as possible. And it's having deadly consequences.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports that alcohol-related deaths among college students rose more than 26% from 1998 to 2005. This same study showed a rise in binge drinking among this same group.¹

These behaviors, when combined with the careless, partying atmosphere of Spring Break, increase vulnerability. Binging students can easily become disoriented and separated from friends in unfamiliar surroundings.

Multiple Substance "Cocktails"

Drinking isn't the only thing happening at late night gatherings. Teens and college students are often combining alcohol abuse with illicit drugs, prescription pills, and over-the-counter stimulants.

Multiple substance cocktails multiply both the speed and effects of intoxication. Worse, the nature of Spring Break camaraderie often means sharing pills and other substances with strangers, which means students may not know what they're consuming.

High-alcohol Content Liquor

Everclear®, today's brand of "hard" alcohol for today's youth, has a potency from anywhere from between 151-190 proof (75%-95% alcohol) and it's still legal in many states.

The popularity of Everclear® has inspired "grain trains," a practice wherein youths bring bottles of hard liquor to parties and mix them with juice or fruit to create what's known as "trashcan punch." These brews are especially dangerous – anyone drinking this mix has no idea how much alcohol they're consuming; the taste of alcohol is largely masked by the fruit.

Rapidly consuming Everclear® and other high proof drinks can bring about alcohol poisoning, a condition that can lead to brain damage or death.

Date Rape Drugs

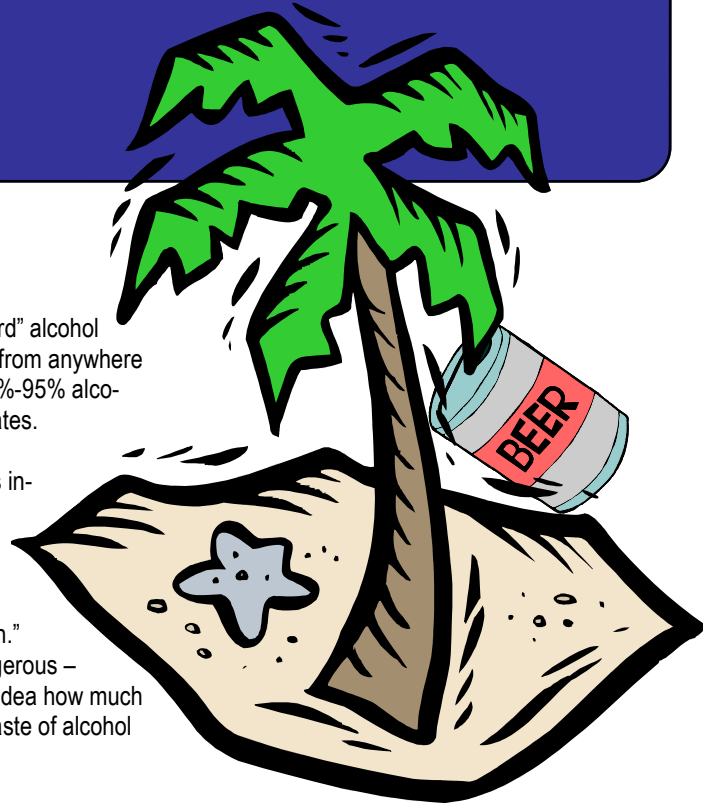
Rohypnol ("roofies"), Gamma Hydrobutrate (GHB or "Grievous Bodily Harm"), and Ketamine ("Special K") are odorless, tasteless, and dangerous illicit drugs that can be dropped into the drinks of unknowing parties.

The DEA has seen significant use of these drugs, particularly in Florida and Texas, popular destinations for Spring Break party goers. Once ingested, these drugs cause victims to become disoriented, lose mobility and sometimes consciousness. Victims often have no memory of what happened after the fact.

The Link Between Partying and Risky Behaviors

Excessive consumption and binge drinking are linked to increased rates of arrest, violence, injury, drunk driving, promiscuous and unprotected sex, contraction of STDs, and rape.

According to a recent study by the Harvard School of Public Health, 72% of college campus rape victims reported being intoxicated when



raped.²

Reducing Risk

If your teen or college-age kids plan on taking a Spring Break vacation with friends, talk to them about these risk reducing actions:

- ◆ Only attend parties with familiar people that you trust.
- ◆ Use the buddy system whenever consuming alcohol. Never attend a party alone.
- ◆ Don't accept drinks made by other people. Never leave your drink unattended. (If your teen is underage, prohibit drinking any alcohol.)
- ◆ Don't ever mix alcohol with other substances, including over-the-counter or prescription drugs.

Remember, your teen or college-age children don't have to be troublemakers or "bad kids" to be at risk from substance abuse. It only takes one lapse in judgment. The best strategy is setting up good decision making *before* they take that trip to the beach.

Resources:

- 1 http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/NewsEvents/NewsReleases/college_drinking_strategies.htm
- 2 <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas/Documents/rapeintox/037-Mohler-Kuo.sep1.pdf>