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Alcohol Abuse in Wisconsin

September 17, 2007



Is binge drinking a major problem in the Northwoods?

Newswatch 12's Rebecca Solomon tells us about a recent report which says the state continues to be one of the nation's worst when it comes to alcohol abuse.

The report, by the Population Health Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, says alcohol abuse, or binge drinking, is a problem in Wisconsin. Today I spoke with one Northwoods bar owner and health official who explain why they think binge drinking statistics in Wisconsin are higher than in other states.

Whether it's on the rocks or a bottle of beer, many say Wisconsinites enjoy alcohol.

Mike Hastreiter is the owner of Buckheads Sports Bar, in Rhinelander. He says, "There's only so much ice fishing and snowmobiling you can do during the winter and I think people fill their void by coming into a bar."

Hastreiter says his busiest nights are the weekends, game days and holidays. It's also on these days when he notices more binge drinking- which occurs more in Wisconsin than the rest of the country, according to a new report by the Population Health Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "People make choices that they wouldn't. You can see the Dr. Jekyle, Hyde come out when people are quiet, all of a sudden are loud and beligerent."

Barenders at Bucketheads Sports Bar say having one or two drinks with friends is okay, as long as you're safe about it. But it becomes a problem when you take it one or two more drinks too far.

The Assistant Director with the Oneida County Health Department, Chrystal Woller, says, "You're looking at risk factors. Underage intercourse or sexual contact with others, may be even non-consensual, so there's a whole bunch of decision making impairments it can lead to."

Because alcohol abuse in the State is at higher levels than the rest of the country, the Oneida County Health Department is working to turn around the stats of alcohol abuse with a five year health plan.

Woller says, "I do know that we are seeing a cultural norm and that if we could change the behaviors and cultural norms, it's going to take time, but it's breaking that norm by education, some strategic programming that it will happen, just take some time."

The Oneida County Health Department plan started this year, in hopes of spreading awareness of alcohol abuse, and again, turn the recent high state statistics on alcohol abuse, around.

Written by: Rebecca Solomon

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