

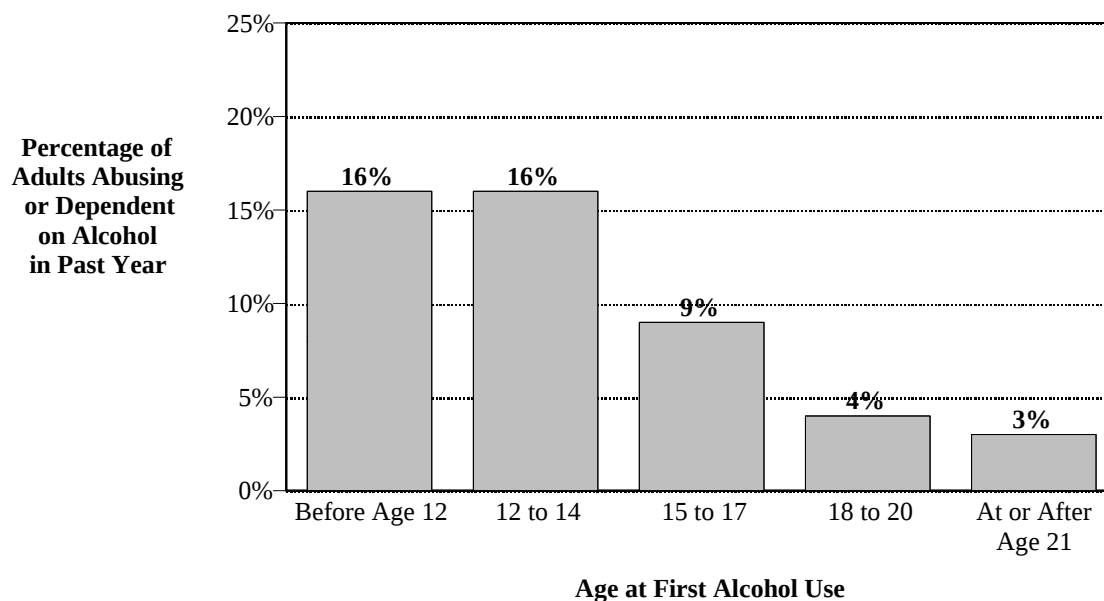
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***Persons Who Start Using Alcohol Before Age 15
More Than Five Times as Likely to Abuse or Be Dependent on Alcohol***

Early alcohol use increases the likelihood of developing alcohol abuse or dependence at a later age, according to an analysis of data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). In 2003, nearly three-quarters (74%) of adults aged 21 or older reported that they had started using alcohol before the current legal drinking age of 21. Those who first used alcohol before the age of 15 were four times as likely to meet the criteria for past year alcohol abuse or dependence than those who started using alcohol at or after age 18 (16% vs. 4%) and more than five times as likely than those who began using at or after age 21 (16% vs. 3%). These findings support previous research indicating that delaying the onset of alcohol use may prevent alcohol abuse or dependence in adulthood¹.

**Percentage of Adults Aged 21 or Older Who Abused or Were Dependent on Alcohol
in the Past Year, by Age at First Alcohol Use, 2003**



¹Grant, BF, & Dawson, DA. "Age at Onset of Alcohol Use and Its Association with DSM-IV Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey," *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9:103-110.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Alcohol Dependence or Abuse and Age at First Use," *The NSDUH Report*, October 22, 2004. Available online at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k4/ageDependence/ageDependence.cfm>.