

SOCIAL HOST PROHIBITIONS:

A Strategy to Prevent Underage Drinking

Why is underage drinking a concern?

Adolescent alcohol use is a risky behavior with considerable negative consequences. It has been associated with unintentional injuries, motor vehicle crashes, interpersonal violence, strained family relationships, and interrupted cognitive development. Research also suggests that adolescents who drink alcohol may have an increased risk of developing an alcohol use disorder over their lifetime. Thus, preventing underage drinking is widely considered a public health priority, and it is one of the goals of Iowa's Five-Year Substance Abuse Prevention Strategic Plan.

What are social host prohibitions?

Social host prohibitions are laws that hold adults accountable for providing alcohol to minors or allowing minors access to alcohol. The laws are intended to reduce underage drinking and related consequences (such as drunk driving) by limiting the availability of alcohol, especially through parties. Details can vary by location; for example, violations may be considered civil or criminal infractions, with different types of penalties, depending on the state or county that enacts the law.

Social host prohibitions are recommended as part of comprehensive alcohol control policies; however, social host laws have received less research attention than other alcohol control strategies. The current scientific evidence is inconclusive whether social host laws actually decrease the amount of alcohol consumed by adolescents; however, social host laws have been associated with fewer drunk drivers, decreased frequency of underage drinking in homes, and smaller size of teen drinking groups. Of note, one study found that social host prohibitions were more effective when parents were aware of the law and local police actively enforced it.

What is the situation in Iowa?

The Iowa state code was amended in June 2014 to add a state-wide social host prohibition. The revised law holds adults accountable for providing alcohol to minors under age 18 or for allowing minors under age 18 to drink alcohol on property that they control. There are several exemptions:

- For parents who provide alcohol to their own minor child;
- For alcohol consumed as part of a religious observance or ceremony; and
- For landlords of rental properties.

There is no violation under the three exempt conditions. Otherwise, social host violations are considered misdemeanors, with a \$200 fine for the first offense and a \$500 fine for the second offense.

Before 2014, at least 23 counties and 26 cities in Iowa had already implemented their own local social host prohibitions. As the state law does not preempt local action, those county and city ordinances have remained in effect. Indeed, other cities and counties may adopt new local ordinances. What's more, local ordinances may be stricter than the state law, such as levying greater fines.



SOCIAL HOST PROHIBITIONS:

Results of a Study in Iowa

What did we do?

Researchers from the University of Iowa College of Public Health sought to understand how social host prohibitions work in Iowa. The research team reviewed data from the Iowa Youth Survey from 2008 to 2016 to understand teen drinking patterns and looked at state alcohol convictions data from 2014 to 2017 to gauge enforcement of the state-wide social host law. In addition, interviews with 8 law enforcement officers and 10 substance use prevention workers gave key insights into typical activities in communities with and without a local social host ordinance.

What did we learn?

Underage drinking has been declining in Iowa but it is still common. In 2016, 21% of 11th graders reported any past-month alcohol use and 13% of them reported binge drinking. Parties and friends remain key sources of alcohol—they were sources for 27% of past-month drinking among 11th graders.

- There have been very few convictions under the state-wide social host law. Instead, county or city ordinances are much more likely to be used (where they exist). In many cases, county or city ordinances carry greater penalties than the state-wide law or address local concerns, such as cannabis or prescription drug use.

Three factors are necessary for successful county or city ordinances:

- Law enforcement leadership;
- County/city attorney agreement; and
- Substance use prevention education.

In particular, prevention workers play a key role in bringing law enforcement and attorneys together and provide essential education about the social host prohibition to the community.

What else can we do?

At the state level:

- Close the state law's young adult gap (at present 18-20 year olds are not liable as social hosts).
- Increase awareness of the state-wide law for both general public and key constituencies.
- Expand the coverage of the social host law (for example, recreational craft such as boats)

At the local level:

- Ensure that the 3 factors for successful local ordinances are in place.
- Conduct regular community education efforts (for example, during spring graduation season).



Key Components of Successful Local Social Host Prohibitions