

## Drinking Age Frequently Asked Questions

National Youth Rights Association  
<http://www.youthrights.org>

### How many countries have a drinking age of 21?

Only five on the entire planet Egypt, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and the United States. The United States is the only non-Arab country with a 21-year-old age. Most other countries have lower drinking ages, and many don't have any drinking age at all.

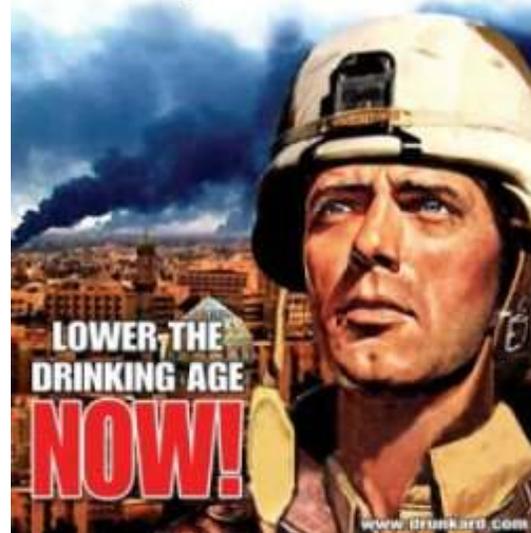
### Did raising the drinking age save 20,000 lives?

No. This is one of the most misguided and over used statistics circulated by the Youth Prohibitionist movement. The truth is, as researchers Peter Asch and David Levy put it, the "minimum legal drinking age is not a significant-or even a perceptible-factor in the fatality experience of all drivers or of young drivers." In an in-depth and unrefuted study Asch and Levy prove that raising the drinking age merely transferred lost lives from the 18-20 bracket to the 21-24 age group. The problem with the 20,000 lives saved statistic is that it looks only at deaths for people aged 18-20. This is like rating the safety of a car by looking only at the seat belt and ignoring the fact that the car frequently tips over while driving. Raising the drinking age may have reduced deaths 18-20 but resulted in more deaths among people 21-24.

Raising the drinking age has not done its job, and its time we look at the problem of drinking and driving honestly to find better options for dealing with the problem.

Another study, conducted by Thomas S. Dee and William N. Evans shows that states that had a drinking age of 18 and raised it to 21 experienced the exact same drop in drunk driving that states who were 21 and remained at 21. Obviously other factors saved those 20,000 lives besides the drinking age.

*Old Enough to Go to War?  
Old Enough to Go to the Bar!*



### People aren't mature enough to handle alcohol till you turn 21. Right?

When you are 18 you are judged mature enough to vote, hold public office, serve on juries, serve in the military, fly airplanes, sign contracts and so on. Why is drinking a beer an act of greater responsibility and maturity than flying an airplane or serving your country at war?

### **Doesn't your body develop up till the age of 21?**

Your body and mind improve all through out life. A 21 year old is different from an 18 year old, just as a 41 year old is different from a 38 year old. Youth Prohibition activists ignore the fact that maturity is a gradual but uneven process that continues throughout life and is not complete on one's twenty-first birthday. Moreover, they ignore the proven medical fact that the moderate consumption of alcohol is associated with better health and greater longevity than is either abstaining or abusing alcohol. The simplest way to prove this argument is for you to look in your medicine cabinet or go to the drug store. Every single over the counter medication defines an adult dose for ages 12 and up. Not 21, but 12. If the FDA can determine that a 12 year old is developed enough to have an equal dose of Tylenol, or Sudafed, or Dramamine, or Zantac 75, then an 18 year old is developed enough to have a glass of wine with dinner.

### **If 18 year olds obtain alcohol with a 21 drinking age, won't lowering the drinking age to 18 just put alcohol within reach of 15 year olds? Wouldn't this create "low hanging fruit"?**

It is true that 18 year olds currently have access to alcohol despite the law. So do most students in high school. In fact -- nearly *three-quarters of 8th graders (71%)* say that it is "fairly easy" or "very easy" to get alcohol. If even a solid majority of 13 year olds have easy access to

alcohol then clearly a strict no-use Youth Prohibitionist method isn't working and a smarter approach needs to be tried.

### **NYRA argues that a strict no-use policy towards alcohol causes many problems, how will simply lowering the drinking age from 21 to 18 change this?**

The National Youth Rights Association doesn't just feel we should lower the age from 21 to 18 and change nothing else. We feel larger change must occur for people under 18 as well. Alcohol must be introduced gradually and at younger ages (12 perhaps) as they do in Europe. Young people must be allowed to get their feet wet through the introduction of alcohol in small amounts in safe environments like the home. Any permanent change to alcohol policy must stress this above all. NYRA feels this period of gradual introduction to alcohol may take a few years, but in no way should it last until 21. If an ending year for introduction is to be named, 18 is far more reasonable.

### **NYRA claims to recognize all the harm alcohol does, if that's true, why do you want to lower the drinking age?**

Alcohol can be a very dangerous substance that causes problems for all people. This is as true for a 17 year old as it is for a 39 year old. The danger of alcohol is real and doesn't go away when someone turns 21. If an organization wished to ban alcohol for the entire population equally, then NYRA would have no reason to stand in their way. NYRA

is definitely not "pro-alcohol", rather NYRA is "pro-youth" and we find it hypocritical that adults point their finger at youth while holding a beer in the other hand. It is time we recognize, and discuss the truth about alcohol rather than creating a young scapegoat for society to blame their alcohol troubles on. Through education, gradual entry, and a relaxing of strict no-use policy towards youth will make drinking safer for people of all ages.

### **I'm over 21; do I have a reason to care about the Drinking Age?**

Yes. The strict and blind enforcement of the drinking age creates many victims over and under 21. Problems for people over 21 include the hassle of being carded at bars and restaurants, and the problem of social segregation. When going out with friends the drinking age drives a wedge between friends over and under 21. Often they are unable to hang out at the same places. Most troubling is what happens to parents who recognize the inevitability of underage drinking will try to provide safe, supervised places for high school students to have parties. These parents can be punished to ridiculous lengths for their attempts to allow safe drinking. In February 2003 Elsa and George Robinson were sentenced to 8 years in prison for providing alcohol at their son's birthday party. That's right, 8 years. The harsh drinking age ruins more lives than it helps.

### **Would NYRA be opposed to lowering the legal limit of Blood Alcohol Content(BAC) for drivers?**

No. NYRA fiercely and unqualifyingly opposes drinking and driving, it is a dangerous practice that should be stopped. NYRA's one and only concern as an organization is age discrimination, that is why we push to reform drinking age laws. As for other alcohol laws not related to age, it really isn't our concern. If states wanted to lower the BAC to .05 for all drivers it wouldn't matter to us. NYRA supports all non-ageist policies that seek to reduce the deadly practice of drunk driving.

### **NYRA describes itself as a "youth rights" organization; do you feel youth have a "right" to drink? Isn't this a trivial issue?**

Certainly there are more critical issues that affect young people in America than drinking alcohol, but the drinking age is a highly visible example of our current anti-youth culture. The National Youth Rights Association does not feel this is an issue primarily about alcohol; rather it is an issue about equality, honesty, respect, discrimination and freedom. If it were shown that Americans of French descent were more likely to abuse alcohol would it be right to pass a law stopping all French-Americans from drinking? No, that would be discrimination. Americans of all ages, races, genders, and ethnicities deserve equal respect, and they deserve the right to make their own choices in life. Youth deserve nothing less. So whether it is choosing to drink a beer, choosing to stay up late, or choosing the next President, NYRA feels society must respect and honor the choices of young people in an equal, fair and honest way.

## Solutions

The National Youth Rights Association realizes the current policy toward alcohol and youth isn't working and it isn't fair. It is time we as a nation implement a smarter alcohol policy; an alcohol policy based on education, toleration, and a message of responsible, moderate use.

The National Youth Rights Association urges an honest attempt be made to model American alcohol policy after Europe. Europeans learn how to drink moderately and responsibly. We must look to the long experience of Italians, Jews, Portuguese, Greeks, Spaniards and many other groups around the world. These groups typically consume alcohol on a regular daily basis but have very few drinking problems. There are three major keys to their success in avoiding alcohol abuse.

-First, in all such groups people learn from an early age how to drink in moderation. They do so from their parents and when they experiment, they do so in the safe protective environment of the family. These groups recognize that it is better to learn to drink in the parent's house than at some house party.

-Second, these groups do not view alcohol as a dangerous poison drug to be avoided nor as a magic potion that can solve life's problems. They view it as a neutral substance that can be good or bad, depending on how it is used.

-Third, these groups view abstaining from alcohol and drinking in moderation to be two equally acceptable choices. What is always unacceptable is the abuse of alcohol by anyone of any age at any time.



The National Youth Rights Association believes a lowered drinking age together with greater acceptance of moderate amounts of drinking for younger people will

reduce the "forbidden fruit" phenomena. Rather than teach young people about the many uses and abuses of alcohol, current law and policy dictates that alcohol is an inherently evil substance and only total abstinence from alcohol can be preached. While abstinence from alcohol is a totally acceptable option it should never eliminate the need for honest, open discussion and education about drinking. Just like any activity in life, drinking responsibly is an activity that one must learn. Currently we deny this healthy process to millions of young Americans. Rather than a gradual introduction to drinking over the period of several years the current attitude towards youth drinking says that a person shouldn't have a drop of alcohol until their 21st birthday, and at that time it is perfectly fine to consume 21 shots of hard liquor. This is like preventing someone from learning to drive and then handing them the keys on their 16th birthday with instructions to "have fun". This policy is dangerous and unrealistic.

The National Youth Rights Association recognizes the need to combat misuse of alcohol, not just use of alcohol. Alcohol can and does cause many problems for many people who misuse it, and every effort must be made to fight the problems caused by misuse of alcohol. By focusing on simple use of alcohol as the problem, current alcohol policy causes more problems than it solves. Many parents across the country recognize the inevitability that their high school children, especially after prom or graduation, will attend parties where alcohol is served, potentially putting themselves and others into danger after the party. In response, parents host parties in their home where they provide alcohol for the prom party, but insist that no one leave the house till sober, and no one drive home. Rather than support such a sensible attempt to promote safe drinking, the Youth Prohibitionist movement attacks such safety conscious efforts as allowing underage people to drink. Currently parents hosting such safety minded parties can be arrested. With no safe, open, supervised place to drink, these parties will just go underground and become secret where they become far more dangerous. Fighting against simple use allows dangerous misuse to grow.

The National Youth Rights Association believes that unrealistically and dogmatically clinging to a strict no-use policy allows the tree of "forbidden fruit" to flourish. Alcohol is handled like anything else in life, if adults treat teens like children and demand they not drink a drop of alcohol without ever having an honest discussion on the subject the teens (or anyone in a similar situation) will seek to defy such instructions and become more likely to drink. There are many reasons why people of any age choose to consume alcohol, but the way in which people under 21 drink is a direct cause of the harsh Youth Prohibition they suffer under. Rather than drink a glass of wine with dinner, or have a beer while watching football, drinking has been given an illicit allure that makes drinking an event unto itself, prompting dangerous binge drinking parties. NYRA suggests a better way. We believe that society must learn to appreciate alcohol as a neutral substance. If adults stop demonizing youth drinking it will lose its allure. Lowering the drinking age will make drinking boring.

NYRA needs your help!

Lowering the Drinking Age is an idea whose time has come. The National Youth Rights Association is organizing a nation-wide network of local chapters to work on lowering the drinking age to 18 and promoting moderate, responsible use. Be a part of this movement by starting a local NYRA chapter at your school or in your community.

For more resources on lowering the drinking age, check here:

<http://www.youthrights.org/drinkingage.php>

Start a chapter here:

<http://www.youthrights.org/chapters.php>

Or just get in touch with us for more information!

# YouthRights.org

NYRA@YouthRights.org

202-833-1200 x5714

1133 19<sup>th</sup> St., NW

9<sup>th</sup> Floor

Washington, DC

20036