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The Governor's Prevention Partnership and State Police urge parents to be vigilant during prom/graduation season

*National study reports drug/alcohol abuse rising as teens become "complacent"
45 percent reported "heavy daily drinking" as no big deal*

Hartford, Conn. – During this prom and graduation season, The Governor's Prevention Partnership and the Connecticut State Police are urging parents to open lines of communication and to talk with their teens about the dangers of underage drinking and drug abuse. This renewed call-to-action comes on the heels of the release of a new national study, the 22nd annual Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), sponsored by MetLife Foundation and The Partnership at Drugfree.org, which highlights that as underage drinking becomes more normalized among adolescents, parents feel ill equipped to respond.

"Parents must take an active role in making sure their teenagers don't have access to drugs and alcohol," said Colonel Danny Stebbins, Commanding Officer of the Connecticut State Police. "During prom and graduation season, especially, parents must take their role seriously and guide their children by warning them about the dangers associated with underage drinking and drug abuse."

Key findings in the PATS study included:

- *Almost half (45 percent) reported they do not see a "great risk" in heavy drinking
- *Only 31 percent of teens strongly disapprove of teens and peers their age getting drunk
- *A majority of teens, 73 percent report having friends who drink alcohol at least once a week

While the number one reason teens reported using alcohol is that they think it's fun, a significant number reported using alcohol to deal with stress.

- *One in three (32%) said they drank to "forget their troubles"
- *Nearly one in four (24%) said they used alcohol to help deal with problems at home
- *One in five (20%) of teens reported they drank to "deal with the social pressures and stress of school".
- *Teens who begin drinking before the age of 15 are much more likely than other teens to develop problems with alcohol as adults. (DeWit, J. Adlaf, E. et al. (2000) *Age at First Alcohol Use: A Risk Factor for the Development of Alcohol Disorders*, *Am J Psychiatry* 157:745-750)

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Jill Spineti, President of The Governor's Prevention Partnership, stated "We feel it's our responsibility to offer parents a plan of action to help engage their teenagers in healthy conversations about underage drinking and drug abuse. Our teens need to be reminded frequently about the serious consequences associated with underage drinking and drug abuse. Our children are especially vulnerable during prom and graduation season, when parties are frequent and summer vacation is around the corner."

The PATS survey also found that parents feel unprepared to respond to underage drinking by their children. Almost a third of parents (28 percent) feel "there is very little parents can do to prevent their kids from trying alcohol."

During this prom and graduation season, the Connecticut State Police will remain very active to ensure public safety on all public roads and highways. Safety for all prom events will be paramount and Troopers will make every effort to be visible to set the safety standard. Working with the Governor's Prevention Partnership, the State Police will utilize every tool in our public safety toolbox to ensure safety.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership together with The Connecticut State Police have developed a **seven-step plan of action** to help remind parents about what to do as prom and graduation parties are held throughout the state, and the risk for underage drinking and drug abuse is increased:

1. **Parents Must Not Serve Alcohol.** Serving alcohol to minors is a serious, criminal offense. Even allowing underage youth access to alcohol (without directly providing it) violates Connecticut's social hosting law. In addition, parents who provide or allow underage youth access to alcohol open themselves up to significant financial liability. Beyond legal ramifications, it's important to remember that young people who start using alcohol before age 15 are five times more likely to have alcohol-related problems later in life (U.S. Surgeon General, 2007).
2. **Trust, but Verify.** Know your son or daughter's itinerary for the evening and check in with other adults or your child. In this day of cell phones, it's not unreasonable to "check in" with your child to confirm that they are where they say they are. Establish a curfew with your teenager based on past behavior and trustworthiness. Discuss your expectations and involve him or her in these decisions.
3. **Don't Forget Social Media.** Check your teenager's Facebook, MySpace or Twitter account. If you don't know what something means – ask. There are lots of slang terms used as code to cover drinking and drug use, so if you're unsure as to what is being said, check out teenchatdecoder.com or decoder.drugfree.org.
4. **Consider Throwing An Alcohol-Free Party.** One strategy to keep teens safe is to host an alcohol-free party. This too requires vigilance, as everyone entering must be checked at the door and nobody should be allowed to leave and then return. Parents should also consider banning backpacks and outside beverages. Water bottles and other containers should not be allowed, as it's very easy to substitute alcohol for the original contents.
5. **No Hotel Rooms.** Do not rent teens a hotel room or let them go off to a remote location (like someone's vacation home) without proper adult supervision. Teenagers and unsupervised seclusion can be a recipe for disaster.

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6. **Talk To Your Teen (Listen Carefully Too!)** Even if you have talked previously with your son or daughter, prom and graduation nights are good times to reinforce your expectations. Don't just talk—listen and be reasonable. Specifically, talk about the dangers of getting into a car with someone who has been drinking.
7. **Be Available.** Agree that your son or daughter can call you at any time for help or advice and that you will pick him/her up if needed, no questions asked that night. Create a code word that your son or daughter can use to indicate that help is needed.

For more information about Connecticut laws related to underage drinking, please visit www.preventionworksct.org/CCSUD.

Created in 1989, The Governor's Prevention Partnership is a not-for-profit partnership between state government and business leaders with a mission to keep Connecticut's youth safe, successful and drug-free leading to a stronger workforce tomorrow. Co-chaired by Governor Dannel Malloy, The Partnership provides leadership and services to help schools, communities, youth organizations, colleges and businesses create and sustain quality mentoring programs and prevention initiatives in the areas of school violence and bullying, underage drinking and drug abuse.