



# NEWS

30 Arbor Street, South Building, Hartford, CT 06106  
P: 860.523.8042 F: 860.236.9412 [www.preventionworksct.org](http://www.preventionworksct.org)

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CONTACT: Liz Hall  
(860) 523-8042/(860) 305-9544

## Don't Break Off the Conversation Before Spring Break Begins *10 Safety Tips for Parents to Share With Their College Students*

HARTFORD, CONN.—The Governor's Prevention Partnership is offering safety tips for parents to share with their college-age sons and daughters as they prepare to head west and south for spring break.

Throughout March, college students will travel to sun-splashed havens hyping the all-you-can-drink party passes and booze cruises that have become staples of spring break. For the 2.5 million beach-bound students, alcohol use is the dominant theme perpetuated by promoters, student travel agencies and social network sites such as My Space and Facebook.

Travel during spring break intensifies the dangers that many 18- to 21-year-olds face on their own campuses from underage and high-risk drinking that each year claims 1,700 lives and contributes to increases in unintentional injuries, assault, sexual assault and unsafe sex.

"Even though their sons and daughters are adults who will be miles if not an ocean away, parents can still utilize a powerful tool: their voice," said Kate Antonucci, a specialist in substance-abuse prevention who manages school and community programs for The Governor's Prevention Partnership. "Parents should speak up about health and safety risks and share tips that will help their children avoid dangerous situations. In having these conversations, parents can arm themselves by visiting the Web sites of student spring-break travel agencies and top destinations (when surfing the Internet, type in location and spring break) to learn about the activities to which their college students will be exposed. Parents should also be aware that many of the foreign countries their children will be visiting have lower drinking ages than the United States' 21-year minimum."

"Students go away for spring break with the perception that it's about drinking and hooking up," Antonucci said. "Whether they're already involved in risky activities or not, the expectation can make it more likely that they will engage in that behavior. Where the drinking age is lower, students may be tempted to drink. Parents can help counteract that self-fulfilling prophecy by stating their expectations, and letting their young adults know that just because the drinking age may be lower, doesn't mean they have to drink."

Multiple national studies have found that while the proportion of students who drink (about 68 percent) and binge drink (around 40 percent) has changed little since 1993, those who binge drink are doing so more often and in greater amounts. Meanwhile, girls have caught up with boys in terms of binge drinking.

In a 2006 poll of college co-eds by the American Medical Association, 83 percent of students agreed that spring-break trips involve heavier drinking and increased sexual activity compared to what typically occurs on college campuses.

"Alcohol use among teens and college students is one of our leading health problems today, damaging too many young lives," said Peter Rockholz, deputy commissioner of the state Department

of Mental Health and Addiction Services. “Parents often don’t realize the amount of drinking that goes on during spring break, or they think that it’s the same as when they went to college. Drinking among teens and young adults has taken on a more dangerous and extreme form. It’s imperative that we don’t just sit back and resign ourselves to the risks they are taking. Parents still have influence on their college student’s behavior and setting expectations and having honest conversations can help them to make the right decisions while away.”

Key safety points for parents to discuss with their college students before spring break include:

- Discuss the dangers of alcohol consumption and be clear that you expect your son or daughter to follow your family’s rules about drinking, even if the laws are different in another country.
- Advise them to never leave a beverage unattended and to only consume beverages from cans and bottles they open themselves.
- Know the laws of the locations they are visiting, including legal drinking laws.
- Review basic precautions such as: travel in pairs or groups and avoid carrying large sums of money but have enough for transportation and taxis.
- Make sure they’re prepared by carrying a credit card and a medical insurance card.
- Ask traveling college students to provide the names and numbers of the places where they will be staying as well the numbers of their cell phones and their friends’ cell phones.
- Ensure college students bring a pre-paid calling card, since many cell phone plans don’t include international calls. Arrange for them to check in with you during the trip.
- Check that your son or daughter’s cell phone lists an “in case of emergency” (ICE) number.
- Obtain the contact information of any tour company that your son or daughter used to book the vacation.
- Be aware that anyone traveling in or out of the U.S. by air must have a passport.

Co-chaired by Gov. M. Jodi Rell, The Governor’s Prevention Partnership is a not-for-profit collaboration of state and business leaders dedicated to strengthening prevention programs in schools and communities that keep Connecticut youth safe, successful and drug-free. The Partnership is the only statewide organization focusing exclusively on youth prevention with major partners including the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

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