

What to do in an Alcohol or Other Drug Emergency

It is important that in an alcohol or other drug related emergency that you call for help as soon as possible. Precious time wasted in decision making can affect a person's chances of recovery or possibly cause death. If you are not sure it's an emergency calling for help is never the wrong move. Don't be the one to make a decision. Call for help and let the professionals do that for you:

If you are concerned for any reason:

Call 100 on campus or 617-253-1212 off or from a cell phone.
(911 from a cell phone will go to Framingham and take more time)

When someone is intoxicated

DO:

- Continually monitor him/her.
- Check his/her breathing.
- Wake him/her frequently to make sure he/she is not unconscious.
- When lying him/her down, make sure his/her head is to the side to keep him/her from swallowing vomit.
- Stay calm. Do not let your anxiety transfer to the person in trouble.
- Have another person with you to help.
- Keep him/her comfortable by talking calmly and in short, simple phrases.
- If he/she is expressing suicidal thoughts, do take him/her seriously. People are more likely to act on suicidal feelings when under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Call for help: 100 on campus and 617-253-1212 off campus or from a cell phone

DON'T:

- Let the person drive or ride a bike.
- Put another drunk person in charge of taking care of him/her.
- Give food, drink (including coffee) or medication to sober the person up.

- Give him/her a cold shower. The shock may cause him/her to pass out!
- Argue with or threaten him/her while intoxicated.
- Try to walk, run, or exercise him/her.
- Attempt to constrain him/her.
- Put him/her to bed. Intoxicated people often become so "relaxed" that they can pass out and choke on their own vomit.
- Allow him/her to leave alone.

REMEMBER: THE ONLY THING THAT CAN SOBER A DRUNKEN PERSON IS TIME!

Alcohol Poisoning

Acute alcohol intoxication, or alcohol poisoning, can occur after the ingestion of a large amount of alcohol. Factors (body weight, height, body chemistry, if the individual ate before drinking) influence how a person may react to large amounts of alcohol. Inexperienced drinkers, those sensitive to alcohol, or those who consume larger amounts of alcohol in a small period of time may become acutely intoxicated and suffer serious consequences even after ingesting smaller amounts of alcohol. When ingested in larger quantities, alcohol slows body functions, including heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing. When alcohol significantly depresses these vital centers, unconsciousness results, this is one step away from coma and possible death.

Signs & Symptoms of Alcohol Poisoning:

- Unconsciousness or semiconsciousness. He/she is unable to respond or be woken up.
- Slowed or irregular breathing. Slow respiration, eight or less breaths per minute or lapses between breaths or more than 10 seconds.
- A pulse rate lower than 40 beats per minute is a medical emergency.
- Cold, clammy, pale, or bluish skin.
- Repeated episodes of vomiting
- Vomiting while "sleeping" or passed out, and not waking up when vomiting.

Note: a person does not need to exhibit all of these signs/symptoms to be at risk.

If you encounter someone who exhibits one or more of these symptoms, you should call for help. This is a medical emergency. While waiting for medical transport, gently turn the intoxicated person on his/her side and maintain that position by placing a pillow in the

small of the person's back. This is important to prevent aspiration should the person vomit. Stay with the person until medical help arrives. Any individual may not yet have alcohol poisoning, but his/her blood alcohol level can continue to rise, for up to 90 minutes after he/she has had his/her last drink. This means he/she has a potential risk of alcohol poisoning and may need to be monitored.

Call for help under the following conditions:

If he/she is:

- unable to stand or walk, or can do so only with difficulty
- only poorly aware of his/her surroundings
- has difficulty breathing
- has passed out or is stuporous
- has fever or chills
- has difficulty speaking or identifying him/herself to others
- is reported to have consumed a large quantity of alcohol, or chugged, or ingested other sedating or tranquilizing drugs within the last 30 minutes
- drug intoxication suspected

If the individual is not showing any of the above symptoms, consider if the following three conditions are met:

- He/she is conscious, alert, and appears to understand the risks of the situation
- He/she can state his/her name, class, and campus address
- He/she is able to stand or walk without assistance, although speech may be slurred.

Then the following steps are beneficial:

- Get the person to bed
- Place him/her on his/her side with a pillow on the small of the back
- Check on him/her every 10-15 minutes for the remainder of the night

Information Provided by the CDSA at MIT (Community Development and Substance Abuse Center for Prevention, Policy, and Research) for more information go to <http://cdsa.mit.edu/help/>