

the RED CUP Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q How many drinks does it take to get alcohol poisoning?

A. A lot of alcohol questions seem to be answered with “it depends...” and this is one of them. Having alcohol poisoning means that you’ve consumed too much alcohol, and “too much” is determined by your gender, weight, the quantity and strength of the drinks, and how quickly you’ve consumed them. Too much alcohol can act as a “poison” in the body, signaling the central nervous system to slow down and eventually shut down vital life functions.

A small woman will require less alcohol than a large man to experience alcohol poisoning. Poisonings have occurred at BAC ranges of .25 to .4, so going by BAC only is not a sure thing.

How do you know if a friend has alcohol poisoning? Are they semi-conscious, vomiting, breathing slower than normal? Don’t be afraid or embarrassed to call paramedics to check your friend out. Too much alcohol slows down many body functions, including blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, and the gag reflex (which prevents choking). A fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop these functions. This is referred to as the depressant effect of alcohol because the central nervous system directs breathing to slow down. Carbon dioxide accumulates in the bloodstream which can lead to coma and death. Someone can also choke on their vomit leading to death by asphyxiation. People who have overdosed on alcohol are unable to help themselves at this stage so it’s up to friends to get help. Know the signs, know what to do, be a friend.

Also, alcohol poisoning is not caused by any particular type of alcohol, but rather consuming too much of it. Students often say hard alcohol is the culprit, but this is due to the fact that it’s faster to down 1 oz. shots than 12 oz. beers. It’s worth repeating... too much, too fast can become a medical emergency.



wildfact

97% of UA students prefer to be with someone who doesn’t drink at all or drinks moderately and stays in control. (2009 Health & Wellness Survey, N=1,720)

Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu and have a chance to win a \$100 Best Buy gift card during the Spring 2010 semester.



The Red Cup Q&A is written by Lynn Reyes, LCSW, LSAC, David Salafsky, MPH and Lee Ann Hamilton, MA, CHES, in the Health Promotion and Preventive Services (HPPS) department of the UA Campus Health Service.