

## Information Sheet

# Alcohol Poisoning

### *What is alcohol?*

Ethyl alcohol, or ethanol, is a drug found in beer, wine, and hard liquor. When swallowed, it gets into the blood quickly and then throughout the entire body. Alcohol acts on the central nervous system as a depressant. In small amounts, it can make some people feel good and relaxed.

Like all drugs, having too much of it in your body can be dangerous. Some adverse effects of drinking alcohol include:

- Slowed reaction time
- Poor judgment & reckless behavior
- Slurred speech
- Unsteady balance & poor coordination
- Sleepiness
- Alcohol use by pregnant women can cause harm to the baby

Alcohol can be more dangerous to your health when combined with over-the-counter or prescription drugs. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before drinking alcohol while on any medication.

### *What is alcohol poisoning?*

In large amounts, alcohol irritates the stomach and may cause vomiting. It depresses nerves that control breathing, heart rate, and the gag reflex. (This reflex prevents choking on anything, including vomit, which may block the airway). An overdose of alcohol can stop these functions completely. An overdose can also cause seizures and permanent brain damage.

### ***Seek medical help for anyone who has any of these signs of alcohol poisoning:***

- Confusion
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Slow or irregular breathing (less than 8 breaths per minute)
- Pale or blue-tinged skin
- Unconsciousness or "passing out"

**According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2001 alcohol played a role in over 75,700 deaths nationwide.**

Never leave an alcohol overdose victim alone to "sleep it off." The level of alcohol in their body may continue to rise. They are in danger of vomiting in their sleep, seizures, coma, and death. Don't worry that a victim may become angry or embarrassed. You could save their life by getting medical help to them.