

FAST FACTS

Regarding Minimum Legal Drinking Age

Brief History of Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA)

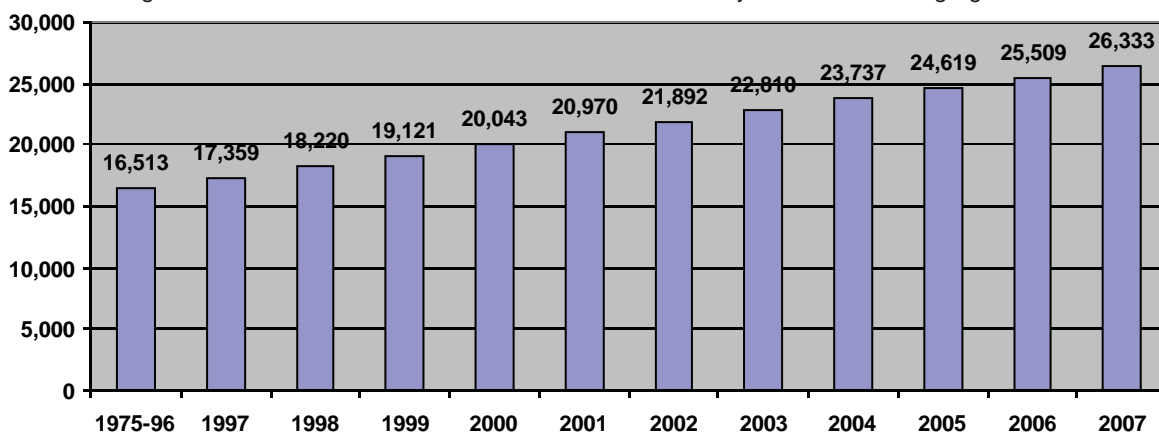
- After Prohibition, nearly all states restricting youth access to alcohol designated 21 as the minimum legal drinking age (MLDA).
- Between 1970 and 1975, 29 states lowered the MLDA to 18, 19 or 20, at a time when the minimum age for other activities such as voting, also occurred.¹
- Scientists began studying the MLDA and its effects of being lowered, focusing particularly on the incidence of motor vehicle crashes--the leading cause of death among teenagers.¹
- With evidence that a lower drinking age resulted in more traffic injuries and fatalities among youth, citizen advocacy groups pressured states to restore the MLDA to 21.¹
- Between 1976 and 1983, 16 states increased their MLDA's. With resistance from other states and a concern that minors would travel across state lines to purchase and consume alcohol, Congress enacted the Uniform Drinking Age Act in 1984, mandating that states either make the MLDA 21 or the amount of their federal transportation funds would be reduced.¹

21 saves lives

- According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), increasing the minimum drinking age to 21 is credited with having saved 26,333 lives on the nation's highways between 1975 and 2007. (See Figure 1 below.)
- Other studies have found that the MLDA is responsible for a 19% net decrease in fatal crashes involving young drivers, and is currently responsible for saving approximately 1,000 young lives each year.²

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) *Traffic Safety Facts, Young Drivers, 2007* – <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811001.PDF>

Figure 1. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws 1975-2007



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The current law is working

- Teen drinking is down. Twenty-five percent fewer high school seniors drink today than did in 1983.³
- Teen binge drinking is down. Fifteen percent fewer high school seniors engage in binge drinking today than they did in 1983.³
- Alcohol-related fatal crashes involving teen drivers have dropped by more than half--from 22 per 100,000 licensed drivers 15 to 20 years old in 1982 to fewer than 10 per 100,000 in 2003.³

The adolescent brain is a work in progress

- The human brain is not fully formed at puberty as earlier thought, but continues important maturation that is not complete until about age 24.⁴
- One of the brain areas still maturing during adolescence is the prefrontal cortex--the part of the brain that enables us to assess situations, make sound decisions and keep our emotions and desires under control.⁵
- Alcohol - and likely other drugs - affects the young person and the developing brain more profoundly than its impact on adults, suggesting that adolescents are more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol compared to adults.⁴
- Children who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are five times more likely than those who start after age 21 to develop alcohol problems.⁶

...but they're old enough to enlist & vote, and Europeans drink at an early age...

- According to the Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Military Personnel, it found that 21 percent of active duty military personnel age 20 and younger reported heavy alcohol use within the past 30 days.⁷
- A lower drinking age promotes unsafe binge drinking. Most European countries with lower drinking ages have not only higher drinking rates, but higher binge drinking/intoxication rates.⁸
- European countries are now looking to the U.S. for research and experience regarding the age-21 policy.⁹
- Compared to Americans, binge drinking rates among young people are higher in every European country except Turkey. In Britain, Denmark and Ireland, they are more than twice that of the U.S. level.⁹

There's a reason that many American rights have different ages of initiation.

Different stages of maturity and experience factor into the age determinations:

12 = Hunting license

16 = Driver's License

18 = Vote/Serve in military

21 = Rent a hotel room

25 = Rent a car

25 = Serve in the U.S. House of Representatives

35 = Serve as U.S. President

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