



Report: Underage drinking is a problem in El Paso

Paso Del Norte Health Foundation is behind study

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Underage drinking in El Paso

EL PASO, Texas - Underage drinking is a major problem in El Paso, according to a new report by The Paso Del Norte Health Foundation.

During a news conference Thursday , the foundation revealed the findings of its report and talked about possible solutions.

The report found that 28% of high school freshman reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days and about 17% reported binge drinking, or having 5 or more drinks in a row on one occasion.

Some reported being in a car with a driver who had been drinking, while one in four said they had driven after drinking alcohol.

Dr. David Jernigan, an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who was the primary author of the study said alcohol is the drug of choice in El Paso.

"What we found is that El Paso is slightly above the national average," said Dr. Jernigan.

Jernigan said underage drinking statistics have fallen in recent year nationwide.

"We're very concerned that this is still the leading drug problem among young people," said Jernigan.

The study said young people who are exposed to underage drinking are likely to engage in sexual intercourse, unintentionally get pregnant, suicide and car wrecks.

Many times, Jernigan said it is adults who are providing teens with alcohol thinking they'll be safer drinking at home.

"In the first place, they're not safer and in the second place you're making decisions for somebody else's children as well," said Jernigan.

The Paso Del Norte Health Foundation and Jernigan said while education is important, it is time that law enforcement get involved and El Paso city council should pass a law known as the social host ordinance.

Jernigan said it is a national solution to curb underage drinking.

Earlier this year, city council directed the city manager to bring them a law that holds adults accountable when they provide alcohol to minors or host gatherings where underage drinking is happening.

The Paso Del Norte Health Foundation, which is behind the ordinance, said because the local law focuses on where the drinking takes place rather than just on who provides the alcohol it is easier for police to intervene quickly.

Penalties would be civil meaning the homeowner wouldn't face a misdemeanor and possibly a fine.

In April, during a discussion at a council meeting, representatives considered a starting fine of \$250, even if the homeowner is unaware the party is taking place.

An ordinance has not been approved by council.

"the city attorney's office is struggling with some of the things we're asking for and they are trying to make sure that it is legal for our city and that we are covered constitutionally," said Jana Renner, associate program officer at PDNHF.

She hopes they can come to a compromise.

In the meantime, Jenner said the organization will use its Shift+ Initiative to help stop underage drinking in El Paso.

To read the entire report, click [here](#).