

## Surge Reported in Energy Drink Emergency Department Visits

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November 28, 2011 — The number of emergency department visits associated with nonalcohol energy drinks is surging, according to a report from the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

In 2005, the agency recorded 1,128 such visits and in 2009 it recorded 13,114 such visits, with the highest number occurring in 2008 (16,055). Data are not yet available for 2010.

"Energy drinks used in excess or in combination with alcohol or drugs can pose a serious health risk," said SAMHSA administrator Pamela S. Hyde in a press release.

The agency defines energy drinks as flavored beverages containing high amounts of stimulants such as caffeine. The drinks are marketed to youth and are consumed by up to 50% of children, adolescents, and young adults.

The report, entitled Emergency Department Visits Involving Energy Drinks, is based on data from SAMHSA's 2005 to 2009 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) reports. DAWN is a public health surveillance system that monitors drug-related hospital emergency department visits reported in the United States.

The report found that in 44% of emergency department visits involving energy drinks, the drinks were taken together with other substances, such as alcohol, pharmaceuticals, and illicit drugs. This combination of energy drinks and other substances of abuse was greatest in young adults 18 to 25 years of age (52%).

The vast majority (77%) of these visits were made by people 18 to 39 years of age, and 64% were made by males, according to the report.

Energy-drink-related emergency department visits involving males were twice as likely as those involving females to include the use of alcohol (20% vs 10%) or illicit drugs (12% vs 5%).

Female visits were more likely than male visits to involve the combined use of energy drinks and pharmaceuticals (35% vs 23%).

Studies indicate that excessive caffeine intake from energy drinks can cause adverse reactions, such as arrhythmias, hypertension, and dehydration. Combining energy drinks with substances of abuse raises the risk for serious, even life-threatening, injury and for the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, such as driving under the influence.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has developed a pocket guide for healthcare professionals and others to help with screening and brief intervention for youth who might have alcohol problems, including cases involving energy drinks.

"The beverage industry, consumer groups, community coalitions, the healthcare community, teachers, parents, and others must get the word out that quick-fix energy drinks are not a solution and carry great risks, especially in combination with other substances of abuse," said Ms. Hyde.

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