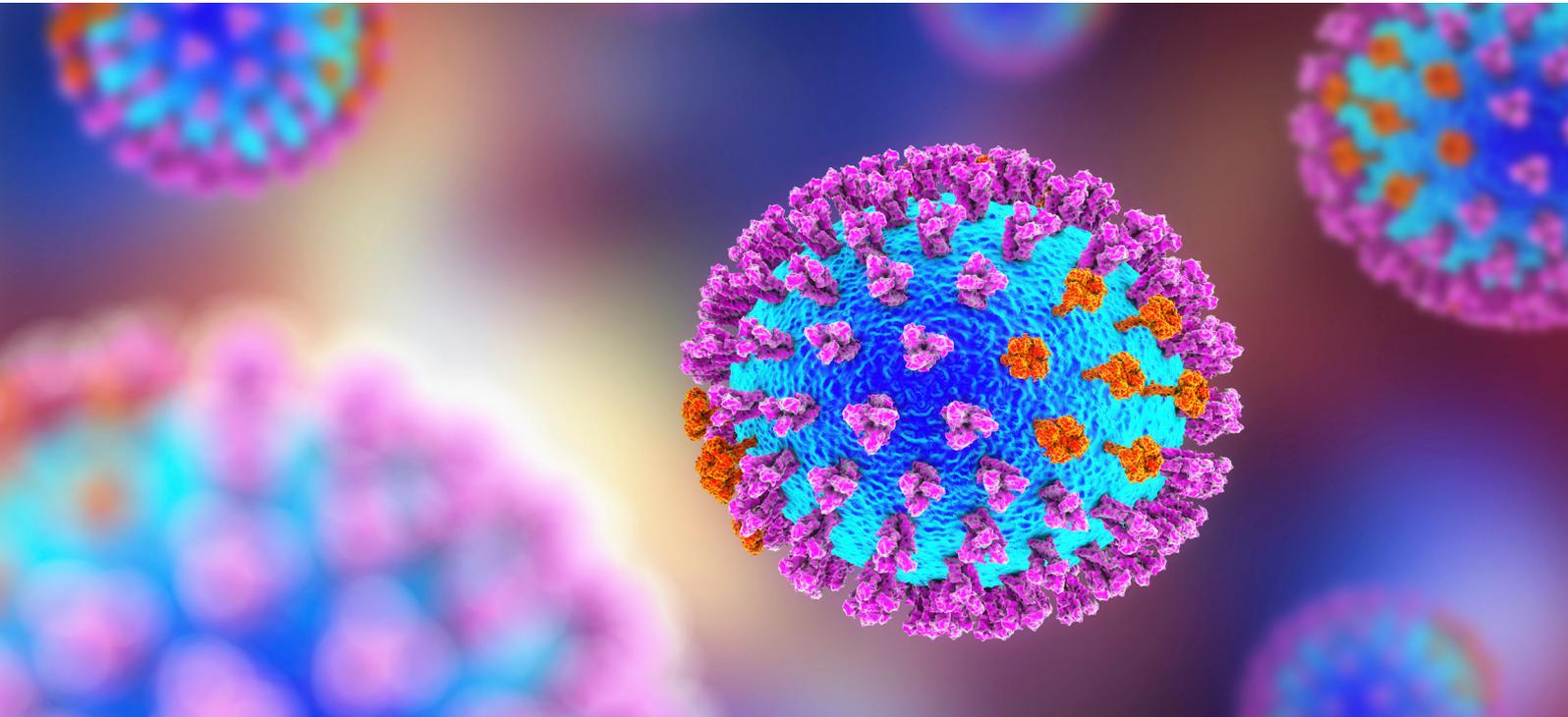


SUBSTANCE USE DURING A PANDEMIC

OFFICE OF WELLNESS PROMOTION



NOW MORE THAN EVER

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the first six weeks of a student's first year in college are a vulnerable time for high-risk substance use and substance-related consequences because of student expectations and social pressures at the start of the academic year. Compound this with the current pandemic, racial unrest and upcoming U.S. election, young adults are experiencing elevated adverse substance use and disproportionately worse mental health outcomes.

"Young adults need and value their parents' and supporters' guidance as they make decisions..." Sheri Dawson, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The same can be said for current students unexpectedly embarking on a semester like no other.

Research suggests that young adults whose parents talk with them about alcohol avoidance before they begin their first year of college are more likely to not use alcohol or to limit use – and thus experience fewer alcohol-related consequences (Dawson, 2020). Now more than ever is the time to discuss with your student, the impact of increased or high-risk substance use.

HAVING THE TALK

- Look for opportunities to raise the topic naturally. Discussions about majors and course selection can lead to a conversation about the ways in which substance use can disrupt academic success and career options. Emphasize that any decisions about substance use should be made in accordance with the law and their health.
- Discuss reasons not to use. Explain the risks of alcohol and other drug use – especially now during COVID-19. Appeal to your student's life goals. If you have a family history of substance use problems, be honest. Explain how they may be more at risk for developing problems with substance use.
- Realize that your student will likely be in a social situation where drinking or other drug use are happening, and some of the people they are with could be of legal drinking age.
- Discuss how they should decide whether to refuse an offer, and talk about the various reasons to avoid using alcohol or drugs and how and when to say "no."
- Be prepared for questions and be open about your own choices regarding substance use. Your student might ask if you drank alcohol or used other drugs when you were underage. Share an example of a lower risk strategy you choose to make when consuming.
- Remind your student that using alcohol or other drugs to cope with stress, to forget problems or to try to feel comfortable in a situation that feels unsafe or threatening is never a good idea.

SHARE THE FACTS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have indicated that U.S. adults are experiencing elevated adverse substance use and mental health conditions associated with COVID-19. Younger adults have experienced increased substance use, disproportionately worse mental health outcomes, and elevated suicidal ideation.

- Alcohol use weakens the body's ability to fight infections, which increases the risk of complications and makes it harder to recover.
- Alcohol use contributes to an increased risk of acute respiratory distress syndrome and pneumonia, which are sometimes associated with COVID-19.
- COVID-19 infection will make it more difficult to inhale smoke. Individuals who vape, smoke cigarettes, or smoke drugs, such as crack or methamphetamines, may have worsened breathing problems.
- If infected, COVID-19 will worsen the respiratory depression effects of opioid or benzodiazepine use.
- COVID-19 symptoms are similar to substance use withdrawal symptoms.
- People with poly-substance use are at increased risk due to drug interactions and potential overdose.
- Severe anxiety can cause relapse into alcohol or substance use in those trying to adapt and cope to elevated stress levels. This can also occur in those without diagnosed Substance Use Disorders.
- Reduced access to alcohol due to business closures may lead to increased rates of acute withdrawal syndromes and hospital presentation for withdrawal management.

(Pitt-PERU, 2020)

SLOW THE SPREAD

- Wash hands often with soap and water, cover coughs and sneezes, and avoid close contact with other people – even friends;
- Wear masks when leaving home and
- Learn about COVID-19 facts, which can help them feel more in control of what is happening.

(Pitt-PERU, 2020)

SHARE STRATEGIES

Share these strategies with your student to help them manage stress:

- Avoid alcohol and drugs;
- Remain social but from a distance, such as reaching out to friends by phone, text, video chat, and social media;
- Find ways to relax and practice self-care, including breathing exercises, stretching, or meditating;
- Continue activities they enjoy, like exercising, gaming, reading, or other hobbies;
- Keep to a schedule, including times for doing schoolwork, relaxing, and connecting with friends;
- Talk with someone they trust about their thoughts and feelings;

(Pitt-PERU, 2020)

CONNECT WITH US

We are here to support you and your student in navigating these conversations. We know that misperceptions such as ‘everybody drinks or smokes’ lead to high-risk behaviors among students. At WCU, we have several events and programs aiming to promote accurate, healthy norms and decision-making skills regarding substance use.

Your student can get involved, by visiting www.wcupa.edu/wellness, calling **610-436-0730**, emailing wellness@wcupa.edu, or connecting with us on social media.



Facebook: WCUWellness



Instagram: WCUWellnessPromotion

YouTube: WCU Wellness Promotion

Twitter: WCU_Wellness

