



## Reinier de Graaf Groep

Your son or daughter has been admitted to hospital suffering from alcohol poisoning. This may be quite a shock for you and your child. This leaflet explains the significance of this hospital admission for you both. It also informs you about the aftercare given to children admitted with alcohol poisoning. Finally, the consequences of drinking at a young age are described.

### **Consequences of alcohol poisoning**

Children suffering from alcohol poisoning may experience hypothermia, shock, a blackout or other health problems. Afterwards they may well be unable to remember anything about the incident. While in hospital, your child's vital signs – respiration, temperature and blood pressure – will be monitored. However, the long-term consequences must also be investigated, as alcohol poisoning may cause brain damage, resulting in poorer performance at school and behavioural changes. These effects may occur even if your child has never consumed alcohol before.

### **The aftercare process**

The Reinier de Graaf hospital has developed a process of aftercare for children who have suffered from alcohol poisoning. During the process your child will be under the care of a paediatrician and a psychologist. The aim is to ensure that your child recovers properly after his/her admission and to prevent any recurrence. Research has shown that children's behaviour does not change automatically after the shock of experiencing alcohol poisoning; medical assistance will be needed to help get your child back on track. It is also important that a child's parents or guardians receive the right information. The aftercare process at our hospital consists of the following steps.

1. Appointments with paediatrician and psychologist Soon after your child has been discharged from the hospital, you and your child will be called to attend two appointments: an appointment with the paediatrician and an appointment with a psychologist, usually on different dates. At these appointments, your child's physical and emotional condition will be discussed. How has your child fared after his/her alcohol poisoning? How has he/she performed at school and how has his/her social contact been affected? Has he/she experienced physical complaints? If possible, it is preferable for both parents or guardians to attend. Naturally, you will also be given the opportunity to ask questions.

2. Advice Following the appointments with the paediatrician and the psychologist, you will be advised about any follow-up steps. It may be that further examinations are required or that your child will need further support. If so, the hospital will arrange for the necessary examinations, support and/or referrals.

3. Evaluation No more than six to eight months after the alcohol poisoning occurs, a final appointment will take place with the paediatrician and psychologist, following which the process will, in principle, come to an end. We will examine whether your child has benefited from the aftercare process. If more aftercare proves to be necessary, this will be discussed with you. It is important that the whole process be completed, as further problems – both physical and mental – may arise some months after the incidence of alcohol poisoning.

The process described above is intended to prevent your child from suffering from alcohol-related health problems in future. As a parent, you can play your part by laying down clear rules for your child. We would advise you to forbid children younger than 18 from consuming alcohol. Research

has shown that when parents do this, the risk of excessive alcohol consumption is smaller than when parents allow such children to drink incidentally. If you are considering allowing children older than 16 to drink alcohol now and again, please bear in mind that a child's brains actually continue to develop until he/she reaches the age of 23. Regular alcohol consumption has a negative impact on that development, particularly if more than five drinks are consumed at any one time (such behaviour is referred to as 'binge drinking'). But even drinking small amounts on a regular basis can cause brain damage to young people. It is important for parents to set a good example and be clear about what a child can and can't do. If your rules are broken, make sure that you take action. The best way to treat your child is to be clear and consistent.

### **Talk about the risks**

Consuming alcohol at a young age poses more risks than most youths and their parents realise. The risk of brain damage is mentioned above. However, there are many other risks too. A detailed explanation of the risks, produced by the Trimbos Institute (the national institute of mental health and addiction in the Netherlands) is set out below.

- Alcohol is particularly unhealthy during the growth phase. The average person's brains continue to develop until their 24th year. Alcohol disrupts that development and may affect your child's character and behaviour. Children who drink regularly face a greater risk of alcoholism in later life. During puberty, the growth of bones and muscles accelerates. Alcohol disrupts the hormonal balance that influences these processes, reducing quantities of male and growth hormones. Alcohol consumption is known to curb bone development in boys.

- Impaired performance at school, study and work. After spending an evening drinking, a person's memory function is impaired. This means that it becomes more difficult to concentrate. A young person's body takes longer to break down alcohol than an adult's does. This means that, after spending an evening drinking, they will still be under the influence the next morning. Like adults, young people need at least two days to recover after a weekend of heavy drinking.

- Greater risk of unsafe sex. When under the influence of alcohol, young people will more readily do things they would not do otherwise. After drinking, they are more likely to have unsafe sex. Half of young people doubt whether they would be able to use a condom when under the influence of alcohol.

- Increase in accidents and aggression. As well as reducing a person's self control, alcohol also reduces their responsiveness. This increases the risk of accidents. Research has shown that young people who drink when they go out are more likely to be a victim or perpetrator of aggressive behaviour.

- Blackouts are common. A blackout can happen if an excessive amount of alcohol is consumed within a short time span. At the time of drinking everything seems fine, but the next day all recollection of it will be gone. Regular blackouts can cause permanent brain damage.

- Increased risk of alcohol poisoning. When they go out, young people often drink large amounts of alcohol very quickly, increasing the risk of alcohol poisoning. Alcohol poisoning causes the nervous system to shut down and leads to unconsciousness. In the gravest of cases, it may even result in a coma or death.

More information about alcohol abuse in young people can be found on the following websites:

[www.alcoholinfo.nl](http://www.alcoholinfo.nl)

[www.trimbos.nl](http://www.trimbos.nl)

[www.alcoholpagina.nl](http://www.alcoholpagina.nl)

[www.stap.nl](http://www.stap.nl)

[www.alcoholpreventie.nl](http://www.alcoholpreventie.nl)

[ec.europa.eu/comm/health](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/health)

[www.ias.org.uk](http://www.ias.org.uk)

[www.watdrinkijj.nl](http://www.watdrinkijj.nl)

[www.uwkindenalcohol.nl](http://www.uwkindenalcohol.nl)

[www.polikliniekjeugdentalcohol.nl](http://www.polikliniekjeugdentalcohol.nl)

**Questions**

If you have any further questions, please contact the paediatrics polyclinic on (015) 260 36 90 or the secretary of the child and youth psychologists on (015) 260 4521. You can also send an email to [polikliniekeugdenalcohol@rdgg.nl](mailto:polikliniekeugdenalcohol@rdgg.nl).

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