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News Release

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Acting Surgeon General Issues National Call to Action on Underage Drinking

In its first *Call to Action* against underage drinking, the U.S. Surgeon General's Office appealed today to Americans to do more to stop America's 11 million current underage drinkers from using alcohol, and to keep other young people from starting.

Acting Surgeon General Kenneth Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H., laid out recommendations for government and school officials, parents, other adults and the young people.

"Too many Americans consider underage drinking a rite of passage to adulthood," said Dr. Moritsugu. "Research shows that young people who start drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to have alcohol-related problems later in life. New research also indicates that alcohol may harm the developing adolescent brain. The availability of this research provides more reasons than ever before for parents and other adults to protect the health and safety of our nation's children."

Although there has been a significant decline in tobacco and illicit drug use among teens, underage drinking has remained at consistently high levels. The 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health estimates there are 11 million underage drinkers in the United States. Nearly 7.2 million are considered binge drinkers, typically meaning they drank more than five drinks on occasion, and more than two million are classified as heavy drinkers.

Developed in collaboration with the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Call to Action identifies six goals:

- Foster changes in society that facilitate healthy adolescent development and that help prevent and reduce underage drinking.
- Engage parents, schools, communities, all levels of government, all social systems that interface with youth, and youth themselves in a coordinated national effort to prevent and reduce underage drinking and its consequences.
- Promote an understanding of underage alcohol consumption in the context of human development and maturation that takes into account individual adolescent characteristics as well as environmental, ethnic, cultural, and gender differences.
- Conduct additional research on adolescent alcohol use and its relationship to development.
- Work to improve public health surveillance on underage drinking and on population-based risk

factors for this behavior.

- Work to ensure that policies at all levels are consistent with the national goal of preventing and reducing underage alcohol consumption.

"Alcohol remains the most heavily abused substance by America's youth," said Dr. Moritsugu. "This Call to Action is attempting to change the culture and attitudes toward drinking in America. We can no longer ignore what alcohol is doing to our children."

Copies of *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* and other related materials are available at www.surgeongeneral.gov or by calling the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-729-6686.

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