

Teens Should Be Screened for Drugs in ER, Study Says

May 31, 2006

Copyright © 2006 Join Together. Reprinted with permission from JoinTogether.org

Research Summary

Youths who come into hospital emergency rooms for treatment of trauma injuries should be routinely screened for alcohol and other drugs, a new study concludes.

The New York Times reported May 30 that researcher Peter F. Ehrlich of Michigan Medical School and colleagues found that 40 percent of teens admitted to one emergency room tested positive for alcohol or other drugs. "Adolescents are often characterized by risk-taking behavior, and when alcohol or other substances are involved, the resulting combination can be, and is often, lethal," they noted.

Researchers said that many hospitals do screen patients for alcohol or other drugs, but only use the information to guide medical decisions and don't follow up with referrals to addiction treatment. But Ehrlich said that injured teens may be primed for an intervention.

At the hospital studied, all patients were supposed to be screened, but only 193 of 443 patients tracked were. The study found that 29 percent of the teens tested positive for opiates, 11 percent tested positive for alcohol, and 20 percent had signs of past marijuana use.

The study appears in the May 2006 issue of the Journal of Pediatric Surgery.

Ehrlich, PF, Brown, JK, and Drongowski, R. (2006) Characterization of the drug-positive adolescent trauma population: should we, do we, and does it make a difference if we test? *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*, 41(5): 927-930.