

ALCOHOL POISONING

(Yes, Alcohol is a Toxin)

A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

How can you tell if someone is about to become a victim of alcohol poisoning?

And if they are, what can you do to help?

Signs and Symptoms:

Alcohol depresses nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing, heartbeat, and the gag reflex that prevents choking. A fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop these functions. After a person stops drinking, the alcohol in the stomach continues to enter the bloodstream and circulate through the system. Therefore, a person's blood alcohol level will continue to rise AFTER they stop drinking. The person may experience the following:

- Mental confusion, stupor, coma, unable to wake/rouse the person
- Unconscious or semiconscious
- No response to being talked to, shouted at, or pinching the skin
- Vomiting while sleeping or unresponsive
- Seizures
- Slowed breathing (fewer than 8 breaths per minute)
- Irregular breathing (10 seconds or more between breaths)
- Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, paleness.

Appropriate Action:

- If on campus, Call Campus Safety IMMEDIATELY, ask them to call 911, they will direct the emergency services to the correct location. (If calling 911 from campus, the dispatcher will not be able to automatically tell which campus location you are calling from). Tell Campus Safety and the emergency personnel how much the intoxicated person drank, if known. If calling from off campus, call 911 directly. Drinking black coffee, taking a cold bath or shower, or sleeping/walking it off cannot reverse alcohol poisoning. The person MUST have immediate medical attention.
- While waiting for Campus Safety and/or 911 emergency transport, gently turn the intoxicated person on his/her side and maintain that position. This is important to prevent aspiration (choking) should the person vomit. Stay with the person until medical help arrives. If a person appears to be "sleeping it off", it is important to realize that even though a person may be semi-conscious, alcohol already in the stomach may continue to enter the bloodstream and circulate throughout the body, thus raising their Blood Alcohol Level (BAL). The person's life may still be in danger. Of you are having difficulty in determining whether an individual is acutely intoxicated, contact a health professional immediately – you cannot afford to guess!