

# HC DrugFree

HC DrugFree: Keeping Howard County *in the KNOW!*  
...knowledge is power, so just say KNOW

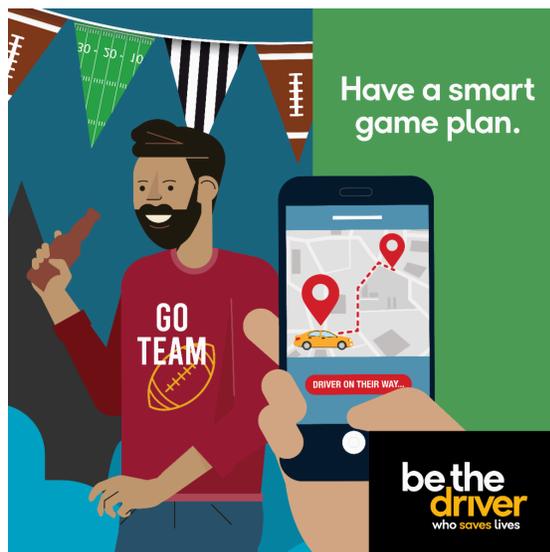


## Super Bowl Safety

Super Bowl Sunday is a time to gather, cheer, and celebrate. Whether you're hosting or attending a party, a little planning can help keep everyone safe and enjoying the game.

### Plan A Winning Party 🏆

- 🚗 Prevent impaired driving: Encourage guests to plan a sober ride home before kickoff. Use a designated driver, rideshare, or carpool with someone who isn't drinking



- 🍹 Offer non-alcoholic options: Provide plenty of water, soda, mocktails, and other alcohol-free drinks so everyone has fun choices.
- 🍕 Serve food throughout the game: Snacks and meals help keep guests comfortable and encourage responsible decisions.

### Be A Responsible Host 🏠

- 🔑 Store medications safely: Keep prescription and over-the-counter medications locked, out of sight, and out of reach of children and teens.
- 🔒 Secure drinks at parties: Monitor beverages, avoid shared containers, and keep alcohol inaccessible to youth.
- 🛑 Know when to stop serving: Switch to desserts, coffee, or non-alcoholic drinks later in the game.

### Make Safety Part Of the Game Plan ❤️

A safe celebration helps everyone enjoy the Super Bowl and get home safely. Planning ahead, offering alternatives, and practicing safe storage are simple ways to protect your guests and your family.

Have fun, cheer loud, and keep safety a priority this Super Bowl Sunday.



### Dates to Remember

- February 1-28 - [American Heart Month](#)
- February 1-28 - [Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month](#)
- February 1-28 - [Black History Month](#)
- February 1-28 - [National Cancer Prevention Month](#)
- February 9 - [Teen Advisory Council Meeting](#)
- February 14 - [Valentine's Day](#)
- February 15-23 - [Random Acts of Kindness Week](#)
- February 16 - [President's Day](#)
- February 23 - March 1 - [National Eating Disorders Awareness Week](#)
- February 25 - [Free Life Skills Classes](#): Day 1 of series (see update below)

## Understanding Opioid Trends in Howard County

Howard County's [Substance Use Dashboard](#) provides a look at current opioid-related trends in Howard County and helps guide prevention, treatment, and community response efforts.

### Key Takeaways (2020–2023)



Overdoses are declining

- Both non-fatal and fatal opioid overdoses have decreased since 2020.
- 2023 showed significant improvement
- Non-fatal overdoses decreased 37% from 2022
- Fatal opioid overdoses decreased 30% from 2022



Most overdoses occur at home

- Nearly 58% of overdoses between 2021 and 2023 happened at residential addresses.

### Prevention Efforts Making a Difference Remember to safely store and dispose of all unwanted and expired medication.

- 2,457+ pounds of unused medication collected during Drug Take Back Day in 2023
- 3,135+ pounds collected through medication drop boxes
- 2,366 naloxone kits distributed across the county

These efforts help reduce access to unused medications, prevent misuse, and save lives.

### What Substances Are Being Detected?

Recent substance analysis shows:

- Fentanyl remains the most commonly detected substance
- Many samples contain multiple substances, increasing overdose risk
- This reinforces the importance of prevention education and safe medication practices

### Howard County Overdose Risk Map

The Overdose Risk Map looks at factors that increase overdose risk across Howard County ZIP codes.

Color-coded areas show where overdoses and risk factors are more common

[Click here to explore the map.](#)

## High Schoolers: Assist Our Instructional Team

We have an exciting opportunity for Howard County high school students!!

Join our "**Spring 2026 Instructional Team**" to assist the **HoCo-raised College Student Instructors** logging in from the University of Maryland.

Dates: February 25, March 4, 11, 18, 25, April 8, 22, 29. Time: 5:15 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. on Zoom.

**Earn Community Service Hours** for your time as well as mentor younger students and **add this leadership opportunity to your resumes/college applications.**

[Register here.](#) [Learn more.](#) [Print high school flyer.](#)

Our team will be encouraged to join at 4:45 p.m. (30 minutes before class starts) to get briefed on that day's class topics and provide feedback on a special project. Team members **MUST** remain on camera! Positive role models need to be seen and fully engaged!

Don't want to be on the Instructional Team? No worries. Of course, high school students not interested in serving on our team are very welcome to attend the classes to gain the knowledge. See update below.



### HoCo Teens: Join Our Instructional Team

HC DrugFree is providing another series of FUN and interactive skills-based classes designed to promote positive health and personal development for students in grades 6 to 9. **High school participants (grades 9-12) earn Community Service Hours** by assisting our college instructors throughout the course. You can act as a mentor and role model, while continuing to practice your own personal development skills. **Register now** using the link below!

The curriculum is designed to strengthen student abilities in the following areas:

- Self-Image & Self-Improvement
- Social Skills
- Resolving Conflicts
- Coping with Uncomfortable Feelings
- Personal Self-Management Skills
- Evaluating Advertising & Entertainment
- Drug Resistance Skills
- And MUCH MORE!!!

Meeting via Zoom on Wednesdays 5:15 p.m. - 6:45 p.m. on: February 25; March 4, 11, 18, 25; April 8, 22, 29

Learn more: [HCDrugFree.org/currentevents](https://www.HCDrugFree.org/currentevents)

**HCDrugFree** Empowering the Community  
443-325-0040  
LifeSkills@hcdrugfree.org  
www.HCDrugFree.org  
Funding provided by the Howard County Health Department, MDH, and SAMHSA

## Free! Life Skills Classes Now Open for Registration!



### HoCo Kids: FREE Life Skills Classes

HC DrugFree is providing another series of FUN and interactive skills-based classes designed to promote positive health and personal development for students in grades 6 to 9 (or slightly younger or older). The curriculum is designed to strengthen student abilities in the following areas:

- Self-Image & Self-Improvement
- Social Skills
- Resolving Conflicts
- Coping with Uncomfortable Feelings
- Personal Self-Management Skills
- Evaluating Advertising & Entertainment
- Drug Resistance Skills
- And MUCH MORE!!!

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The 8-class series will run across the following Wednesdays:

**February 25, March 4, 11, 18, 25, April 8, 22, 29 from 5:15 to 6:45 p.m. on Zoom.**

More information can be found on our [website](#) and [flyer](#).

### FREE for HoCo Kids and Teens

HC DrugFree will provide another series of FUN and interactive skills-based classes designed to promote positive health and personal development. This curriculum was designed for **students in grades 6 to 9**, but for slightly younger or older students, we will consider each request. **High schoolers** also have the opportunity to volunteer to assist our instructional team of college instructors and earn community service hours. See update above.

This program will use developmentally appropriate, collaborative learning strategies so students will learn skills that have been shown to help resist high-risk

behaviors including substance use (vaping, alcohol and other drugs) and more. [Learn more and register](#)

## Insights on Alcohol & Health



From Dr. Sarah Wakeman (Harvard Medical School, Mass General Brigham)  
Featured on the [Mel Robbins Podcast](#)

Alcohol is often seen as a way to relax or socialize, but medical research shows it carries real health risks. Dr. Sarah Wakeman explains why rethinking our relationship with alcohol is important for long-term health and prevention.

### Key Takeaways 🧠

- Alcohol (ethanol) is a chemical that reaches the brain within minutes and quickly affects judgment and coordination.
- Alcohol is not a health behavior. Any perceived benefits from “moderate” drinking disappear when studies are properly analyzed.
- Any amount of alcohol increases cancer risk, including breast, liver, and digestive cancers.
- Alcohol disrupts sleep, worsens anxiety and depression, and can lead to long-term brain changes with heavy use.
- Many alcohol-related problems go unnoticed. Drinking more than intended, difficulty cutting back, and cravings are common warning signs.

### Supportive Steps for Change ❤️

- Set realistic goals and plan ahead for social situations.
- Notice emotional or social triggers for drinking.
- Choose non-alcoholic options when possible.
- Seek support early. Change works best without shame.

### [Read more](#)

If you or someone you care about is concerned about alcohol use, support and resources are available. Prevention starts with knowledge.

February 9: Teen Advisory Council Meeting



Free! HC DrugFree invites **all Howard County students in grades 8-12** to join our Teen Advisory Council (TAC).

To RSVP/register to receive the **Monday, February 9 Zoom meeting link**, [click here](#). Meetings will run from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Each meeting has a unique link, so members must RSVP/register before each meeting.

**Students:** If you have not submitted a 2025-26 registration, please complete [this form](#). Members of TAC attend our monthly meetings and serve as student ambassadors in their schools and in the community.

### Why join TAC?

- Earn Community Service Hours
- Gain experience for job & college applications
- Volunteer opportunities year round
- Be a leader and role model in Howard County

[Learn more](#)

## HoCo Student Film Festival - HC DrugFree Category

### HoCo Student Film Festival – Now Open!

HC DrugFree is proud to sponsor a category in the 2025-26 HoCo Student Film Festival. Students are invited to create a PSA for this year's theme:

### **“In The Know: Fake Pills, Real Danger”**

Inspired by the DEA's "One Pill Can Kill" campaign, this category focuses on the risks of counterfeit pills, especially those laced with fentanyl.



### Key Details

- Submission Deadline: April 7, 2026
- Festival Date: May 1, 2026, 7–8:30 PM at Miller Library

- Length: 30 seconds–2 minutes (plus a 10–30 second closing screen)
- Must Include: HC DrugFree logo, website ([hcdrugfree.org](http://hcdrugfree.org)), [Admin@hcdrugfree.org](mailto:Admin@hcdrugfree.org)

For requirements and past winners, visit our [website](#) and the [Film Fest website](#).



**Student Filmmakers**

Submit your film to the HoCo Student Film Fest by April 7 for your chance to win the 2026 HC DrugFree Category!

[hcdrugfree.org/hoco-filmfest](http://hcdrugfree.org/hoco-filmfest)

## Sharps Disposal

**To dispose of sharps:** *The Howard County Bureau of Environmental Services recommends that you place used (or unused) needles in an empty plastic bottle (e.g., laundry detergent bottle) to protect the trash collection crew. When the bottle is full, add the cap and put the bottle in your curbside trash.*

## Join Our Team in 2026

Accepting applications. HC DrugFree is looking for a self-motivated Howard County professional to **take the lead on many day-to-day management duties as well as lead educational projects/programs**. Success in this position may lead to career growth and advancement opportunities.

All candidates must pass a background check and possess strong organizational skills, writing skills, and computer skills. A flexible schedule is a must. Transportation required. Do you have the experience, skills, and energy to lead HC DrugFree - or know someone who does? If so, [apply here!](#)

## Donate Today!



**HCDrugFree**  
*needs your support!*  
*Help us help Howard County*

[www.hcdrugfree.org/donate/](http://www.hcdrugfree.org/donate/)



Your support allows us to provide our FREE resources and programs to the community. Please donate today by visiting [hcdrugfree.org/donate](http://hcdrugfree.org/donate) or mailing a check to: HC DrugFree, 5305 Village Center Drive, Suite 206, Columbia, MD 21044

[Donate here!](#)

## What Do You Think?

Please take our 2-second survey to let us know what you think of the content provided in this newsletter!

[Take Our Survey](#)

## Resources

### **Gambling Addiction:**

Contact 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537) for free, confidential support 24/7 or visit [helpmygamblingproblem.org](http://helpmygamblingproblem.org).

### **NAMI Howard County - Mental Health Services:**

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Howard County is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals affected by mental health conditions and their loved ones. [Download brochure.](#)

### **The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:**

Marylanders who are experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis should call or text 988. Learn more at [988.maryland.gov](http://988.maryland.gov). Maryland veterans and their loved ones can call 988 and press 1 to transfer to the Veterans Crisis Line. Press 2 for Spanish.



### **Free Narcan Training:**

The Howard County Health Department offers a free training so you can be prepared in case of an opioid overdose. Sign up for your free training and Narcan kit today: [Learn more](#)



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## [Additional Resources](#)

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For more information, contact

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