

HC DrugFree

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



Every May, communities come together for [Mental Health Awareness Month](#) — a tradition started by Mental Health America in 1949 to champion emotional well-being and break down the stigma around mental health struggles. This month is a vital reminder that our mental wellness deserves the same care and attention as our physical health.

Whether you are looking for healthy ways to navigate everyday stress, coping with the heavy weight of depression, or just feeling overwhelmed, you don't have to carry it by yourself. Reaching out and talking to a trusted adult, parent, friend, or counselor is one of the most powerful steps anyone can take toward healing and finding support.

Marylanders who are experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis should call or text 988. Learn more at 988.maryland.gov.

Senior Week: Staying Safe in OC

Senior Week should be a celebratory, memorable time with friends and not a risk! With proper planning, it can be a safe and fun experience for everyone.

Check out our [video below](#) for graduating high school seniors and their parents! The tips shared by Howard County teens, the Ocean City Police, and the Ocean City Beach Patrol are appropriate for all families or anyone visiting Ocean City, MD this summer or throughout the year. Our video was recorded in 2024, so some laws/procedures may have changed. Stay safe!



Visit our [Senior Week page](#) for more information.

As mentioned in video, Free Narcan Training is available at the Howard County Health Department: [Learn More](#)

Teen Advisory Council Meeting



Free! HC DrugFree invites **all Howard County students in grades 8-12** to join our Teen Advisory Council (TAC). Our next meeting will be held on Zoom on June 1 from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

[RSVP/register](#) to receive the June 1 Zoom link.

New!!!

Register Now: 2026-2027 TAC Membership

As this school year comes to a close, please submit our **new 2026-2027 TAC Registration**. To do so, complete [this form](#). Members of TAC attend our monthly meetings and serve as student ambassadors in their schools and in the community. We need a new registration from you every school year so even if you submitted one recently, please resubmit!

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](#)

Vaping: The Flavored Hook Trapping a New Generation



Public health officials are monitoring the rapid evolution of youth vaping products, particularly high-nicotine disposable e-cigarettes. Like other highly addictive substances, these products are often marketed with appealing fruit or candy flavors, making it difficult for parents and youth to recognize the true scale of the hazard.

This increases the risk of long-term nicotine dependence, as individuals may believe they are merely inhaling harmless, flavored water vapor. Even short-term experimentation can lead to significant alterations in developing adolescent brains, affecting attention, learning, and impulse control.

This trend reflects a broader concern: the continuous redesign of commercial nicotine delivery systems to appeal directly to youth continues to pose significant risks in school communities.

Families can help by talking with youth about the deceptive marketing practices of the vaping industry and the physical realities of addiction.

Proactive communication is also important. Keep dialogue open, monitor for subtle signs like unexplained coughing or sudden mood shifts, and support youth in navigating peer pressure to reduce risk.

Families can also help reduce risk by practicing safe storage. Medications, alcohol, cannabis, and other substances should always be stored securely and out of reach.

Beyond the Buzz: The Reality of Teens and Alcohol



Even though the legal drinking age is 21, alcohol remains the most common substance young people encounter acting as a depressant that slows down the central nervous system. Because a teenager's brain is still actively developing its pathways for logic, memory, and emotional control, having open conversations about these choices is essential for helping them navigate their social environments safely.

Many students look to a drink as a quick way to unwind from school stress or to ease social anxiety at gatherings. However, using it as a coping mechanism can often backfire, making feelings of stress or everyday anxiety feel more intense once the initial effects wear off. Peer dynamics also play a significant role, frequently creating a subtle, unspoken pressure to participate just to fit into a social circle.

Navigating these situations is much easier when families work together to brainstorm peer-pressure scenarios and establish a clear, supportive backup plan for a safe ride home. Families can also help reduce risk by practicing safe storage. Medications, alcohol, cannabis, and other substances should always be stored securely and out of reach.

GLP-1 and Peptides



A [growing trend on social media](#) is promoting peptide injections as a shortcut to muscle growth, anti-aging, weight loss, and faster injury recovery. While these products may sound appealing, many of the peptides being advertised and sold online are not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and health experts are raising concerns about the risks, especially for teens.

Unlike adults who utilize these medications under strict clinical supervision, adolescents face unique physiological dangers when manipulating their metabolic systems. Developing bodies require a precise balance of nutrients and calories for proper growth, bone mineralization, and organ development; forcing extreme caloric deficits or altering hormone levels through gray-market peptides can permanently disrupt these natural growth cycles. Furthermore, the intense psychological pressure to achieve an idealized body type often drives teens to overlook the physical warnings of substance misuse, framing these weekly injections as mere "wellness optimization."

Addressing this shifting landscape starts with open, supportive conversations about body image and the hidden dangers of ordering unverified chemicals online. Families can also help reduce risk by practicing safe storage. Medications, alcohol, cannabis, and other substances should always be stored securely and out of reach.

Oxycodone: The Familiar Prescription Fueling Hidden Crisis



Public health reports highlight that leftover prescription medications, including oxycodone, remain a primary pathway for youth substance initiation. Like other high-potency opioids, these powerful pain relievers are frequently prescribed for routine medical or dental procedures but left unmanaged in family homes.

This increases the risk of accidental misuse, as young people struggling with stress, anxiety, or physical pain may turn to familiar household supplies to self-medicate. Even short-term, unmonitored use can lead to rapid physical dependence or serious medical emergencies.

This trend reflects a broader concern: the easy availability of unused, highly addictive prescription medications in residential spaces continues to pose significant risks to youth.

Families can help by talking with youth about the mental health and dependency risks associated with using any medication without a doctor's guidance. Safe storage is also important. Keep medications locked, monitored, and out of reach, and properly dispose of unused medications to reduce risk.

A Parent and Teens Guide to Social Media



IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL OVERSIGHT ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Social media and the internet can be a great way to connect with friends, but it has to be used safely and responsibly.



Ask permission before you make an account with any app, website, or social media.



Share all usernames, passwords, and security questions with your parents.



SCAMS

Scammers often place fake ads or send spam messages in an attempt to steal identity or credit card information. Adults are better at being suspicious of these things and identifying them as scams!



STRANGER DANGER

Parental access to chats and social media can prevent communication with strangers, who may be trying to harm, stalk, or prey on young kids. Parents can also restrict inappropriate content.



SCREEN TIME

Setting limits on screen time can be beneficial to keep children healthy and successful in other areas of life, such as with schoolwork, getting enough exercise and spending time outside. Young brains don't have fully developed self-regulation skills yet.

self-regulation skills yet



Remember, parental oversight is for safety-- because they care about you, not because they are trying to be mean!

Stay In the Loop: Follow Us Online!

Want real-time updates and powerful stories from our community?

Follow HC DrugFree on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn to stay informed about important events, helpful resources, and prevention news as it happens.

From last-minute event info to tips that keep your family safe, our social media is your fastest way to stay connected. Join the conversation: be informed, inspired, and part of the movement.

One-Click Links!

Facebook: [HC DrugFree](#)

Instagram: [@hc_drugfree](#)

LinkedIn: [HC DrugFree](#)

Twitter: [@HCdrugfree](#)

Donate Today!



HC DrugFree
needs your support!
Help us help Howard County

www.hcdrugfree.org/donate/

[Donate here!](#)

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

[Donate here!](#)

Resources

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

[Additional Resources](#)

For more information, contact

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