



youth service bureau

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## **Energy Drinks - A Legal High**

*By: Amber Marko and Sarah Holmboe*

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In 2005, Poison Control centers received 4,600 caffeine-related calls. Half of them involved youth. In 2014, they received more than 5,100 calls, and more than 40% involved children younger than 6.

### **Energy drinks are not only popular – they are becoming dangerous and deadly.**

Energy drinks took off when Red Bull was introduced to the United States in 1996. Since then, a variety of energy drinks have hit the shelves at local convenience and grocery stores, bars, and nightclubs – all marketed to youth.

The bright colors, intriguing labels like Rooster Booster and Lost, as well as flashy websites like [www.monsterenergy.com](http://www.monsterenergy.com) appeal to youth.

Let's take a look at some facts about energy drinks:

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### **A typical energy drink contains more than one serving.**

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Most youth don't realize this and inadvertently consume more than the recommended amount.

*A large can of Monster contains 32 fluid ounces = to 4 servings.*

Many energy drinks do not indicate the amount of caffeine per serving. Currently, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations require beverage companies to list caffeine in the ingredients on product labels, but do NOT require them to list the precise amount of caffeine in a product. This left the consumer in the dark on caffeine content.

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### **These beverages are often marketed as healthy “sports performance drinks.”**

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In small amounts they are okay because the caffeine speeds up your central nervous system, making your reflexes faster. In reality, a couple of cans of an energy drink can actually hinder performance.

When youth “amp out,” they lose focus, babble, and can no longer connect things together. Added dangers of energy drinks include tooth decay, mood swings, hyperactivity, diabetes, weight gain, abnormal bowel movements and hypertension. These drinks are also eating away at stomach linings.

The negative effects are endless.

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## In addition to caffeine, energy drinks may also include alcohol.

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In the past, many beverage companies produced alcoholic beverages with added caffeine. Some popular brands included Joose and FourLoko. The FDA found evidence that these sorts of beverages could pose a public health concern, and that the added caffeine was an “unsafe food additive.” These drinks did NOT meet FDA standards for safety.

In 2010 the FDA warned these beverage companies that further action, including seizure of their products, might occur under federal law unless they could prove the safety of their product. As a result, producers of these caffeinated alcoholic beverages either discontinued their products or changed the formula to remove caffeine and other stimulants.

While these energy drink/alcohol combos are pretty much nonexistent in the United States, they may still be available elsewhere. You can see a list of these products here:

<http://www.caffeineinformer.com/alcoholic-energy-drinks-the-list>

However, there are still dangers of mixing alcohol with caffeine. When you mix energy drinks with alcohol it causes a unique reaction. Because energy drinks are a stimulant, adding them to alcohol gives the user the perception that they aren't as drunk as they actually are. Because of this, youth tend to drink more and can easily overdose.

In addition, energy drinks mask the symptoms of being drunk, which gives the user the perception that they aren't intoxicated. This can cause youth to engage in risky activities such as drunk driving.

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**There are many hidden dangers to the use and abuse of energy drinks.** As a parent or caregiver, it is important to be aware of what your kids are drinking. Share the hidden dangers with them. It may make them think twice about taking another sip.

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## Resources

American Heart Association, “Poison control data show energy drinks and young kids don't mix” (2014)  
<http://news.heart.org/poison-control-data-show-energy-drinks-young-kids-dont-mix/>

Food and Drug Administration, “Serious Concerns Over Alcoholic Beverages with Added Caffeine” (2010)  
<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm233987.htm>

Food and Drug Administration, “Update on Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages” (2010)  
<http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/PublicHealthFocus/ucm234900.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Fact Sheets – Caffeine and Alcohol” (2015)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/caffeine-and-alcohol.htm>

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