
Policy: Management of Alcohol Intoxication

1. Alcohol Intoxication

- 1.1. Alcohol intoxication should be treated seriously by all members of staff and therefore contact with the on-call school medical sister must be sought as soon as possible.
- 1.2. Deep coma following alcohol ingestion is a medical emergency. One litre of spirits can be lethal, with smaller quantities putting younger children at risk.
- 1.3. Staff should take a history of the drinking episode from any witnesses as well as from the pupil. Pupils rarely drink on their own so there may be more than one intoxicated person.
- 1.4. Death from alcohol intoxication can be due to inhalation of vomit, hypoglycaemia, and respiratory suppression, hypothermia and acute toxic hepatitis.

2. Management

- 2.1. An unconscious pupil must have airway checked, be placed in the recovery position and admitted to hospital by ambulance.
- 2.2. A pupil suspected of having a head injury as well as intoxication must be admitted to hospital by ambulance.
- 2.3. Conscious pupils may be managed by close observation, until they have recovered, usually four hours.
- 2.4. Any conscious child with alcohol intoxication is to be kept under observation by the School Nurse in the inpatient unit, including overnight if necessary, with assistance from a houseparent or other member of staff if aggressive behaviour is likely.
- 2.5. Having a cold shower, drinking strong coffee or taking physical activity does not influence the rate of disappearance of alcohol from the blood and should not be used as methods to reduce symptoms.

3. Examination

- 3.1. The on-call school medical sister will make any relevant medical assessments.
- 3.2. The assessments may include the following:
 - 3.2.1.1. Establish the level of consciousness, and any impairment in clarity of speech and balance.
 - 3.2.1.2. Record size of pupils and their reaction to light and presence of nystagmus, especially if sustained on lateral gaze.
 - 3.2.1.3. Record pulse, BP, temperature, and details of emotional state.
 - 3.2.1.4. Measure blood glucose level.

4. Hypoglycaemia

- 4.1. In adults, alcohol has little effect on plasma glucose in those who have eaten regular meals. However, after a 24 hour fast, when glycogen is depleted, alcohol consumption causes marked hypoglycaemia. Hypoglycaemia can cause fits. Children, with their greater proportional turnover of food supply, can have alcohol induced hypoglycaemia after only a few hours without food, and this can have fatal consequences.



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