

HALF A MILLION children were drunk in the past month as study shows 11 to 17-year-olds drink 20m units a week

- **Northern England has highest number of underage drinkers**
- **Deaths from liver disease have risen by 25 per cent in less than ten years**

By Anthony Bond

Half a million 11 to 15-year-olds have been drunk in the past month, a worrying new report has revealed today.

Major new evidence of alcohol abuse among children has been revealed by the report, which calls for urgent action to address the growing problem of liver disease in the UK. The study found that children between the ages of 11 and 17 are drinking 20 million units of alcohol every week - the equivalent of almost 10 million pints of beer.

Worrying: Half a million 11 to 15-year-olds have been drunk in the past month, a new report has revealed today. This picture is posed by models

Northern England - from Cumbria to Tyneside and the North West - has the highest number of drinkers among the under-18s.

However, large numbers of children are also drinking in Plymouth and Torbay in the South West and also the Isle of Wight.

Deaths from liver disease have risen by 25 per cent in less than ten years - with obesity and heavy drinking seen as the main causes.

Politicians are divided over how to tackle the problem, with David Cameron controversially set to reject recommendations for a minimum price for alcohol, much to the anger of many GPs. Today's report - the most comprehensive national account of the country's eating and drinking habits - claims hundreds of thousands of people now face painful hospital treatment in middle age and a premature death because of liver disease.



Shocking: The study found that children between the ages of 11 and 17 are drinking 20 million units of alcohol every week. This picture is posed by models

Speaking to The Times, Professor Martin Lombard, the National Clinical Director for Liver Disease, said greater awareness, detection and treatment is needed to combat alcohol-related illness.

'Liver disease is a growing problem in this country,' he said. 'Our perspective on cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and the lifestyle choices that cause them - has changed in recent years, leading to declining mortality rates. But we are only at the beginning of that process for liver disease.'

The new information was collated from millions of items of data from doctors, hospitals and councils.

Across England, about one million people are thought to be alcohol-dependent. However, treatment is subjected to a postcode lottery with only 6 per cent of those affected currently receiving help.

About one in five are at risk of developing liver damage and 700,000 people are thought to already have significant damage.