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# France seeks to halt surge in binge drinking among youths

## Hospital visits increased 30% in three years

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WASHINGTON — When the French school semester started in September, most college students had no lack of drinking opportunities. As is common in

other countries, French freshmen are usually encouraged to drink heavily in initiation ceremonies. But soon the excessive drinking could face a sudden end.

According to a French bill, inciting binge drinking could be punishable with up to a year in jail or a hefty fine. "It will be made illegal to sell products that make alcohol appear pleasant," French health minister

Marisol Touraine reportedly told RTL radio. Targeted products could be "telephone cases or T-shirts that show amusing scenes based on drunkenness."

Organizers of student parties would also be targeted, according to the minister. The proposed law, which also tackles mass-produced food, will need to pass France's General Assembly early next year before going into effect.

The proposed law is remarkable because France is among the world's most liberal countries in terms of alcohol consumption. The legal minimum age for consuming alcohol in public is 18 for spirits and 16 for beer and wine.

While regular alcohol consumption among the young has been low despite these lax regulations, binge drinking poses a new and previously little-

known problem. The country's General Commission of Terminology only recently defined binge drinking as the "massive consumption of alcohol, usually as part of a group, designed to cause intoxication in a minimum amount of time." Defining the phenomenon had become necessary in 2013 after a 30 percent rise in hospital admissions had been reported within only three years.

"We see more and more seriously drunk young people in the emergency room, who will stay for 24 hours, sometimes two days, to sober up," a French doctor told TV channel France24 last year. A 2013 study by the National Institute for Prevention and Health Education confirmed the fears of many parents and doctors that cases of binge drinking were rising rapidly.