

Recent Research on College-Age Drinking

College-age individuals are the most common excessive drinkers.

Young people aged 18 to 24 not only had the highest prevalence of binge drinking (28.2 percent) across all age groups in 2010 but they also tended to drink most excessively, consuming an average of 9.3 drinks on an occasion. In the United States, binge drinking accounts for more than half of the alcohol consumed by adults and 90 percent of the alcohol consumed by underage drinkers.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012, January 13). Vital signs: Binge drinking prevalence, frequency, and intensity among adults—United States, 2010. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 61(1),14-19. From

http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6101a4.htm?s_cid=mm6101a4_w (accessed January 31, 2012).

Social media may offer novel approaches to identifying drinking problems among college students.

College students who post references to getting drunk, blacking out, or experiencing other aspects of dangerous drinking on social networking sites are more likely to have clinically significant alcohol problems than students who do not post such references, according to a study supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). According to Dr. Moreno, study coauthor, “Our study suggests that parents and college health care providers who note references to problem drinking on the Facebook profiles of adolescents should consider discussing drinking habits with their children and patients.”

Moreno, M. A., Christakis, D. A., Egan, K. G., Brockman, L. N., & Becker, T. (2011, October 3). Associations between displayed alcohol references on Facebook and problem drinking among college students. *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*. Advance online publication.

Physicians do not screen the majority of young adults for alcohol use.

Physicians often fail to counsel their young adult patients about excessive alcohol use, even though screening and brief interventions by health care providers can promote significant, lasting reductions in drinking levels and alcohol-related problems. According to a study led by NIAAA, young adults aged 18 to 25 were the most likely to report drinking in excess of NIAAA guidelines, but only 34 percent of them were asked about drinking by their doctors. NIAAA guidelines for low-risk drinking call for men to drink no more than 4 drinks in a day and no more than 14 drinks per week. For women, the guidelines are three or fewer drinks per day and no more than seven drinks per week.

Hingson, R. W., Heeren, T., Edwards, E. M., & Saitz, R. (2011, September 21). Young adults at risk for excess alcohol consumption are often not asked or counseled about drinking alcohol. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. Advance online publication.

Hospitalizations for alcohol and drug overdoses by college-age individuals have increased.

Over the past 10 years, hospitalizations among 18- to 24-year-olds increased by 25 percent for alcohol overdoses, 56 percent for drug overdoses, and 76 percent for combined alcohol and drug overdoses. In 2008, one out of three hospitalizations for overdoses in young adults involved excessive consumption of alcohol. Alcohol overdoses alone caused 29,000 hospitalizations;

combined alcohol and other drug overdoses caused 29,000; and drug overdoses alone caused another 114,000. An alcohol overdose was present in one out of five poisonings on opioid prescription medications. The researchers note that the steep rise in combined alcohol and drug overdoses highlights the significant risk and growing threat to public health of combining alcohol with other substances, including prescription medications.

White, A. M., Hingson, R. W., Pan, I. J., & Yi, H. Y. (2011). Hospitalizations for alcohol and drug overdoses in young adults ages 18-24 in the United States, 1999-2008: Results from the nationwide inpatient sample. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, 72*(5), 774-876.

Environmental prevention appears effective in reducing prevalence and likelihood of intoxication among college students.

A large-scale study involving 14 California campuses found that types of environmental prevention that target settings where students most often engaged in heavy drinking appeared to significantly reduce the incidence and likelihood of intoxication among college students. Safer environmental interventions included nuisance party enforcement operations, minor decoy operations, driving-under-the-influence checkpoints, social host ordinances, and use of campus and local media to increase the visibility of environmental prevention. The greatest reductions were found at universities with the highest intensity of intervention implementation, achieved through heavy publicity and highly visible enforcement activities.

Saltz, R. F., Paschall, M. J., McGaffigan, R. P., & Nygaard, P. M. (2010). Alcohol risk management in college settings: The safer California universities randomized trial. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 39*(6), 491-499.

Most colleges have intervention programs, but many are not implementing empirically supported, community-based alcohol control strategies.

In 2002, the NIAAA College Drinking Task Force issued recommendations to reduce heavy drinking by college students. While most college administrators in 2008 were familiar with these recommendations, more than one in five (22 percent) were not. Nearly all colleges used educational programs to address student drinking (98 percent), and half offered intervention programs with documented efficacy for students at high risk for alcohol problems. Only a few colleges reported the use of empirically supported alcohol control strategies, such as alcohol compliance checks (33 percent), mandatory responsible beverage service training (15 percent), restrictions on alcohol outlet density (7 percent), or an increase in the price of alcohol (2 percent) in their communities. Opportunities exist to reduce student drinking through implementation of existing, empirically based strategies.

NIAAA. (2010). Implementation of NIAAA College Drinking Task Force recommendations: How are colleges doing 6 years later? *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, 34*(10), 1687-1693.

Online alcohol education can be effective when combined with environmental prevention.

Freshman who took AlcoholEdu, an online alcohol prevention course, showed significantly reduced alcohol use and binge drinking during the fall semester. These beneficial effects, however, did not persist into the spring semester. Prior studies have shown that the freshman year is a particularly risky time for hazardous drinking among college students. The NIAAA researchers suggest that AlcoholEdu can be a useful component of an overall strategy that combines campuswide and environmental interventions to prevent harmful drinking by college students. Examples of such strategies include reducing alcohol availability, raising prices, and limiting alcohol promotions and advertising on and around campus.

Paschall, M. J., Antin, T., Ringwalt, C. L., & Saltz, R. F. (2011). Evaluation of an Internet-based alcohol misuse prevention course for college freshmen: Findings of a randomized multi-campus trial. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 41*(3), 300-308.