



Facts on Underage Drinking*

Underage Alcohol Use Overview

- Alcohol is the drug of choice among America's adolescents and is used by more young people than tobacco or illicit drugs. (1)
- Youth generally drink less often than adults, but drink more than adults when they do use alcohol. (2)**
- Approximately 9.3 million 12- to 20-year-olds (or 24.3 percent of this age group) reported drinking alcohol during the past 30 days. About 5.9 million (15.3 percent) were binge drinkers (defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion), and 1.7 million (4.3 percent) were heavy drinkers (defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days). (1)
- Most (81.4 percent) of the 4.3 million individuals who first began using alcohol during the past year were younger than age 21. Approximately 58.3 percent were younger than age 18. (1)
- When asked how easy it would be to get alcohol if they wanted some, the majority of students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades said it would be "fairly easy" or "very easy." (3)
- A majority of underage current drinkers reported that their last use of alcohol in the past month occurred either in someone else's home (54.4 percent) or in their own home (31.4 percent). (1)
- Among underage drinkers who were given, rather than purchased, alcohol, the most common source was an unrelated person age 21 or older (36.2 percent). Parents, guardians, or other adult family members provided the last alcohol to 23.0 percent of underage drinkers. (1)
- Youth drinking is correlated with adult drinking practices. For example, children of parents who binge drink are twice as likely to engage in binge drinking and to meet alcohol-dependence criteria. (4)**

Underage Drinking by Adolescents

- About 11 percent of eighth graders reported drinking during the past 30 days, with 3.6 percent of them drinking to intoxication. Rates for 10th graders were 28 percent reporting past 30-day use and 14.5 percent drinking to intoxication, while rates for 12th graders were 42 percent reporting past 30-day use and 28.1 percent drinking to intoxication. (3)

Prevention Works!

While much work remains, prevention efforts have reduced underage drinking and its consequences:

- ▶ Rates of current, binge, and heavy alcohol use by 12- to 20-year-olds declined between 2002 and 2012. Over this timespan, the rate of current alcohol use decreased from 28.8 to 24.3 percent, and the rate of binge drinking declined from 19.3 to 15.3 percent. The rate of heavy drinking declined from 6.2 to 4.3 percent. (1)
 - ▶ The age 21 minimum legal drinking age laws have reduced alcohol-related traffic fatalities by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 27,677 lives since 1975. (5)
- In 2011, approximately 5.1 percent of high school students had drunk at least one alcoholic beverage on school property during the past 30 days. (6)
 - Among youth ages 12 to 17 who were heavy drinkers, 67.9 percent were current illicit drug users. (1)

Underage Drinking by College Students

- Among full-time college students, 60.3 percent were current drinkers, 40.1 percent were binge drinkers, and 14.4 percent were heavy drinkers. Among those not enrolled full time in college, these rates were 51.9, 35.4, and 10.7 percent, respectively. (1)
- Approximately 25 percent of college students report academic consequences of their drinking, including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall. (7)**
- About 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die each year from alcohol-related injuries, including motor vehicle crashes. (7)**
- About 97,000 college students are victims of sexual assault or date rape related to alcohol use each year. (7)**
- Alcohol use is involved in 95 percent of all violent crime on college campuses. (7)**

(continued)

Underage Drinking by Gender and Racial/Ethnic Group

- Overall, males have higher rates of underage drinking than females. Among 12- to 20-year-old males, the rates of current, binge, and heavy drinking were 24.7, 16.5, and 5.2 percent, respectively. Comparative rates for 12- to 20-year-old females were 24.0, 14.0, and 3.4 percent, respectively. (1)
- In 2011, among high school girls, the prevalence of current alcohol use was 37.9 percent, the prevalence of binge drinking was 19.8 percent, and the prevalence of binge drinking among girls who reported current alcohol use was 54.6 percent. (8)
- Among 12- to 20-year-olds, Asians had the lowest rate of past 30-day alcohol use at 13.8 percent. Whites had the highest rate of current use at 27.4 percent. Among other groups, the rate of current use was 18.0 percent of Blacks, 21.7 percent of those reporting two or more races, 22.0 percent of American Indians or Alaska Natives, and 23.2 percent of Hispanics. (1)
- Among 12- to 20-year-olds, Blacks and Asians were the least likely to report binge drinking (8.5 and 7.8 percent, respectively). Whites had the highest rate of binge drinking at 18.2 percent. Among other groups, the rate of binge drinking was 13.8 percent of those reporting two or more races, 13.9 percent of American Indians or Alaska Natives, and 14.2 percent of Hispanics. (1)

Overall Health and Safety Risks

- Underage drinking contributes to a wide range of costly health and social problems, including injury and death from motor vehicle crashes, interpersonal violence (such as homicides, assaults, and rapes), unintentional injuries (such as burns, falls, and drowning), brain impairment, alcohol dependence, risky sexual activity, academic problems, and alcohol and drug poisoning. (2)**

- Underage alcohol use can alter the structure and function of the developing brain, which continues to mature into the mid- to late-twenties, and may have long-term consequences. (2)**
- Adults age 21 or older who first used alcohol at age 14 or younger were more than seven times as likely to be classified with alcohol dependence or abuse as adults who had their first drink at age 21 or older (15.2 vs. 2.1 percent). (1)
- On average, alcohol is a factor in the deaths of approximately 4,700 young people in the United States per year, shortening their lives by an average of 60 years. (9)**
- Nearly one fifth (24.1 percent) of high school students reported riding in a car driven by someone who had been drinking. (6)
- In 2010, 26 percent of 15- to 20-year-olds who were driving under the influence and killed in traffic crashes had a blood alcohol content of 0.08 or higher. (10)

For more information on underage drinking and its prevention, visit:

<https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov>

Access the latest *Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking*, with current federal and individual state policies and programs.

* Unless noted, data are from 2012.

** Years in which statistical data were collected are not given or vary; see source document.

Sources

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