



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. More than one fifth of youth begin drinking before age 13. (1)
- Although underage drinkers generally consume alcohol less frequently than adults and consume less alcohol overall than adults, when they do drink, they are much more likely to binge drink. (1)
- Approximately 9.7 million 12- to 20-year-olds (or 25.1 percent of this age group) reported drinking alcohol during the past 30 days. About 6.1 million (15.8 percent) were binge drinkers (defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion), and 1.7 million (4.4 percent) were heavy drinkers (defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion on 5 or more days in a month). (2)
- Most (82.9 percent) of the 4.7 million individuals who first began using alcohol during the past year were younger than age 21. Approximately 61.2 percent were younger than age 18. (2)
- 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 (57.0 percent) or in their own home (28.2 percent). (2)
- Among those who were given, rather than purchased, alcohol, the most common source was an unrelated person age 21 or older (38.2 percent). Parents, guardians, or other adult family members provided the last alcohol to 21.4 percent of underage drinkers. (2)
- Both past-month alcohol use and binge alcohol use by 12- to 20-year-olds declined significantly between 2004 and 2010. These declines were most significant in the 12- to 17-year-old age group, where past-month alcohol use declined by 22.7 percent and past-month binge drinking declined by 29.7 percent. (1)
- Youth drinking is correlated with adult drinking practices. For example, children of parents who binge are twice as likely to binge themselves and to meet alcohol-dependence criteria. (1)

Underage Drinking by Adolescents

- About 11 percent of 8th 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)
- Approximately 5.1 percent of high school students had drunk at least one alcoholic beverage on school property during the past 30 days. (4)

Underage Drinking by College Students

- Among full-time college students, 60.8 percent were current drinkers, 39.1 percent were binge drinkers, and 13.6 percent were heavy drinkers. Among those not enrolled full time in college, these rates were 52.0, 35.4, and 10.5 percent, respectively. (2)
- 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. (5)**
- About 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die each year from alcohol-related injuries, including motor vehicle crashes. (5)**
- About 97,000 college students are victims of sexual assault or date rape related to alcohol use each year. (5)**
- Alcohol use is involved in 95 percent of all violent crime on college campuses. (5)**

Underage Drinking by Gender and Ethnic Origin

- Overall, males have higher rates of underage drinking than females. Among 12- to 20-year-olds, the rates of current, binge, and heavy drinking for males were 25.6, 17.5, and 5.6 percent, respectively. Comparative rates for females were 24.6, 14.0, and 3.2 percent, respectively. (2)
- 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. (6)

* Unless noted, data are from 2011.

** Years in which statistical data were collected vary; see source document.

(continued)

- Among 12- to 20-year-olds, Blacks had the lowest rate of past 30-day alcohol use at 18.1 percent. The rate was 18.8 percent among Asians, 20.0 percent among American Indians or Alaska Natives, 22.5 percent among Hispanics, 27.5 percent among those reporting two or more races, and 28.2 percent among Whites. (2)
- Among 12- to 20-year-olds, Whites had the highest rate of binge drinking at 18.6 percent. The rate was 15.9 percent of persons reporting two or more races, 14.0 percent of Hispanics, and 13.9 percent of American Indians or Alaska Natives. Blacks and Asians in this age group were the least likely to report binge drinking (9.4 and 9.1 percent, respectively). (2)

Overall Health and Safety Risks

- Underage drinking contributes to a wide range of costly health and social problems, including motor vehicle crashes (the greatest single mortality risk for underage drinkers); suicide; interpersonal violence (e.g., homicides, assaults, rapes); unintentional injuries such as burns, falls, and drowning; brain impairment; alcohol dependence; risky sexual activity; academic problems; and alcohol and drug poisoning. (1)
- Underage alcohol use can cause alterations in the structure and function of the developing brain, which continues to mature into the mid- to late-twenties, and may have long-term consequences. (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. (1)
- 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 (13.8 vs. 1.8 percent). (2)

- Approximately 8.2 percent of high school students nationwide reported driving a car or other vehicle one or more times when they had been drinking alcohol during the past 30 days. Among 12th graders, 13.5 percent reported driving after drinking. (4)
- Nearly one fifth (24.1 percent) of high school students reported riding in a car driven by someone who had been drinking. (4)
- In 2009, 24 percent of 15- to 20-year-old drivers killed in fatal crashes had been drinking; more than one fourth (28 percent) of those who died had a blood alcohol content of .08 or above. (7)
- The age 21 minimum legal drinking age laws have reduced alcohol fatalities by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 27,677 lives since 1975. In 2009, an estimated 623 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws. (7)

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

<http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov>



Access the 2012 *Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking* to learn about current federal and state policies and programs.

Sources

- (1) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2012). *Report to Congress on the prevention and reduction of underage drinking*. Rockville, MD: Author. From <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Report-to-Congress-on-the-Prevention-and-Reduction-of-Underage-Drinking-2012/PEP12-RTCQUAD> (accessed February 22, 2013).
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- (4) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012, June 8). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2011. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 61(4). From <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2013).
- (5) National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2012). *College Drinking*. From <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/CollegeFactSheet/CollegeFactSheet.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2013).
- (6) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013, January 11). Vital signs: Binge drinking among women and high school girls—United States, 2011. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 62(1), 9–13. From http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6201a3.htm?s_cid=mm6201a3_w (accessed February 22, 2013).
- (7) National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2011). Young drivers. *Traffic Safety Facts*. DOT HS 811 400. From <http://www.nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811400.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2013).