

# A double-threat to teen health: Researchers say smoking, binge drinking need to be addressed

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As teens head back to school, health teachers may want to revise their lesson plans. Temple researchers have found that kids who engage in heavy drinking will more than likely also engage in heavy smoking, and they say educators can help combat the trend by addressing both topics as one health risk.

"These are important findings because they emphasize the need for education and intervention programs that target the co-occurrence of these two [health](#) risks," said Brian Daly, assistant professor of public health in the College of Health Professions and Social Work.

Daly and colleagues in the department of public health and psychology determined rates of [smoking](#) and binge drinking through the collection of anonymous survey data from 2,450 African-American, Hispanic and Caucasian students in grades 9-12 at Philadelphia public high schools. Students' responses were compiled from the 2007 Philadelphia Youth [Behavioral Risk](#) Survey (YRBS).

Respondents were asked how many cigarettes they'd had per day over 30 days, and how many days over a 30 day period they'd had 5 or more drinks in a row. Data was broken down by race/ethnicity and gender. Researchers found that while Caucasian adolescents were more likely than African-Americans to engage in either binge drinking or [smoking](#), both groups were equally likely to engage in both at the same time.

"In the past 30 years or so, African Americans have traditionally had the lowest instance of smoking and binge drinking," said Daly, who presented his research at the American Psychological Association's annual meeting this week. "Those low numbers resulted in very few studies which looked at both smoking and binge drinking in a diverse sample; most focused only on instances of these in Caucasian or Hispanic adolescents."

Daly says that the equal instances of smoking and binge drinking among both groups highlights the need for a multi-pronged approach to education and intervention.

"We can't just focus on educating adolescents about the dangers of just smoking or drinking," he said. "We need to address both as one health risk, and we need to do that for all adolescents, not just one particular group."

For example, Daly says that when health education teachers talk about the dangers of smoking, they should also touch on the dangers of binge drinking too, illustrating the connection.

The next phase of Daly's research will break down these rates by grade level to determine exactly when [binge drinking](#) and smoking start.

"The difference in the mindset of a ninth grader versus a 12th grader is pretty vast," he said. "And if we can determine when kids start this behavior — whether it's the summer after 8th grade, or when they're a sophomore or a senior — it can help us tailor education and treatment plans even more."

Daly directs the YRBS in Philadelphia, a survey that focuses on six major areas, including unintentional injuries and violence, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviors, dietary behaviors, and

physical inactivity, to determine health risk factors among young people.

Source: Temple University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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