

# Campus-community interventions successful in reducing college drinking

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Heavy drinking among college students results in over 1800 deaths each year, as well as 590,000 unintentional injuries, almost 700,000 assaults and more than 97,000 victims of sexual assaults. In a new study published in the December issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, researchers report on the results of the Safer California Universities study, a successful community-wide prevention strategy targeted at off-campus settings. This is one of the first studies to focus on the total environment rather than on prevention aimed at individuals.

The authors found significant reductions in the incidence and likelihood of [intoxication](#) at off-campus parties and bars/restaurants for Safer intervention universities. Students from Safer universities were 6% less likely to drink to intoxication during the last time they were at any of the targeted settings, 9% for off-campus parties, and 15% for bars/restaurants. There was also evidence that drinking was reduced at fraternities and sororities. These declines were equivalent to 6,000 fewer incidents of intoxication at off-campus parties and 4,000 fewer incidents at bars & restaurants during the fall semester at each intervention schools relative to controls. Furthermore, stronger intervention effects were achieved at Safer universities with the highest level of implementation.

"These findings should give college administrators some degree of optimism that student drinking is amenable to a combination of well-chosen, evidence-based universal prevention strategies," commented lead investigator Robert F. Saltz, PhD, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), Berkeley, CA. "Here, one set of alcohol control

strategies was found to be efficacious, but other combinations may work as well, or even better. With a growing body of such evidence, and combined with strategies already shown to be effective, it will be possible to craft a comprehensive prevention program that ratchets down the harm currently produced by alcohol use on and near college campuses."

The Safer California Universities study involved 8 campuses of the University of California and 6 campuses in the California State University system. Half of these schools were randomly assigned to the Safer intervention, which took place in the fall semesters of 2005 and 2006. Student surveys were completed by undergraduates in four fall semesters (2003 through 2006) and random samples of 1,000 to 2,000 students per campus per year were analyzed. Students were asked about where they drank, whether they had gotten drunk, and whether they had engaged in so-called "binge drinking." They were also questioned about their grade point averages and their general health, as well as other sociodemographic characteristics.

Safer environmental interventions included nuisance party enforcement operations, minor decoy operations, DUI checkpoints, social host ordinances, and use of campus and local media to increase the visibility of environmental strategies. Intervention campuses differed in their level of implementation, but all concentrated on off-campus activities for [drinking](#).

**More information:** The article is "Alcohol Risk Management in College Settings: The Safer California Universities Randomized Trial" by Robert F. Saltz, PhD; Mallie J. Paschall, PhD; Richard P. McGaffigan, MSW; and Peter M. Nygaard, PhD. It appears in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 39, Issue 6 (December 2010). [doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2010.08.020](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2010.08.020)

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