

# Over-65s are frequent binge drinkers: US study

January 10 2012

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Binge drinking is more common in the United States than previously thought, particularly among young adults, though the most frequent offenders are over 65, said a US government study on Tuesday.

One in six Americans, or 17.1 percent of the population, binge drinks, defined as consuming five or more alcoholic beverages in a sitting for men and four or more among women, said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The latest data for 2010 is an increase over the CDC's report on the same topic for 2009, which said about 15 percent of US adults, or 33 million Americans, binge drink, a rate that had stayed the same for more than 15 years.

While the most common age group among the 38 million American who binge drink was 18-34, those who reported doing it most often were over 65, said the CDC's Vital Signs report, which also warned of the health and safety risks of high alcohol use.

Seniors who binge drink reported doing so 5.5 times per month, compared to an average of four times a month among the rest of the binge-drinking population.

The 18-24 age group had the highest amount of binge drinkers (28.2 percent) in their ranks and tended to drink the most -- 9.3 drinks -- in each setting. The age group 25-34 was a close second (27.9 percent).

"Binge drinking by adults has a huge public health impact, and influences the drinking behavior of underage youth by the example it sets," said CDC substance abuse and mental health services administrator Pamela Hyde.

"We need to reduce binge drinking by adults to prevent the immediate and long-term effects it has on the health of adults and youth."

The data was collected by a randomized phone survey in 48 states and the US capital region. This year, it also included cell phones, which likely resulted in a higher number of young people's participation.

The survey found that binge drinking was most common among people who earned \$75,000 or more a year in household income, but those who earned less than \$25,000 a year went on binges more frequently.

Low-income binge drinkers tended to consume excessive alcohol five times per month and 8.5 drinks each time.

Whites and Hispanics were more likely to binge drink than blacks. Also, men were more likely to binge drink than women.

"Binge drinking causes more than half of the 80,000 deaths and three quarters of the \$223.5 billion in economic costs caused by excessive drinking," said the report.

"Drinking too much contributes to over 54 different injuries and diseases, including car crashes, violence, and sexually-transmitted diseases."

The CDC said that raising the price of alcohol, limiting the days and hours when it can be sold, and restricting the number of liquor licenses offered in a given geographic area could help cut down on binge

drinking.

**More information:** CDC report: <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns>

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Citation: Over-65s are frequent binge drinkers: US study (2012, January 10) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-01-over-65s-frequent-binge-drinkers.html>

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