

Underage drinking down in past decade

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U.S. report finds fewer than one in four teens recently had alcohol.

(HealthDay)—Underage drinking in the United States is declining. But, alcohol remains the most widely used substance of abuse among American children, federal researchers reported Thursday.

The rate of current [drinking](#) (within the last month) among youngsters aged 12 to 20 fell from 29 percent in 2002 to 23 percent in 2013. Plus, the rate of current [binge drinking](#) in this age group declined from 19 percent to 14 percent during that time period. Binge drinking is defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion.

However, more American teens use alcohol (23 percent) than tobacco (17 percent) or illicit drugs (14 percent), according to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) report.

The report is based on data from an annual, national survey of 67,500 Americans aged 12 and older.

"When parents communicate clear expectations and they are supported by community efforts to prevent underage drinking, we can make a difference," Frances Harding, director of SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, said in an agency news release.

"However, there are still 8.7 million current, [underage drinkers](#) and 5.4 million current, underage binge drinkers. This poses a serious risk not only to their health and to their future, but to the safety and well-being of others. We must do everything we can to prevent underage drinking and get treatment for young people who need it," Harding added.

Over the last decade, there have been increased efforts to reduce underage drinking, including SAMHSA's "Talk. They Hear You" campaign, which encourages parents and caregivers to talk with children about the dangers of alcohol.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism explains how parents can [prevent children from drinking](#).

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