

# Fewer U.S. high school students drink, CDC finds

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(HealthDay)—Drinking among U.S. high school students has plummeted in recent years, a new government report shows.

High schoolers who say they drink dropped from about half of students in 1991 down to around one out of three in 2015, an analysis of data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals.

Binge [drinking](#) also declined among [high school](#) students, from about 32 percent of all students in 1999 to about 18 percent in 2015, the report found. Binge drinking involves consuming five or more drinks in a row.

But there's bad news in the report as well. Significant numbers of teenagers are still using alcohol, and those who do drink tend to imbibe heavily, the researchers said.

Among students who drink, nearly 58 percent are binge drinkers, said lead author Marissa Esser. She's a health scientist with the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

"They're also drinking intensely," Esser said. "Among high school students who binge drink, more than 40 percent reported consuming eight or more drinks in a row in 2015."

Esser and her colleagues pointed to drinking age laws as a key factor in reducing alcohol consumption among [high school students](#).

Laws that hold parents responsible for the consequences of underage drinking in their homes also have played a large part in cutting down high school drinking, said Marcia Lee Taylor, president and CEO of the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids.

"If teens are drinking in their home, [parents] can be held liable," Taylor said. "The social hosting laws are really making parents understand the consequences, and they're not allowing that to happen as much anymore."

Despite this, adults appear to still be a major source of alcohol for teenage drinkers. In 2015, 56 percent of current high school drinkers and 36 percent of binge drinkers usually got their alcohol from someone who gave it to them, researchers found.

Binge drinkers were more than three times more likely than students who do not binge drink to give someone money to purchase alcohol (31 percent compared with 9 percent) and to purchase alcohol themselves (9 percent compared to 3 percent).

The prescription drug abuse epidemic also might have played a role in reducing [teen drinking](#), by making parents more aware of symptoms related to drug and alcohol abuse, said drug addiction specialist Dr. Scott Krakower.

"People started recognizing more and more of these negative effects, and that also helped to shift people around," said Krakower, an assistant unit chief of psychiatry for Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, N.Y. "Drinking is what allowed a lot of kids to get disinhibited, and then they moved on to pills."

High school boys are more likely to binge drink than girls—51 percent compared with 35 percent, the study showed.

The researchers noted that other less-utilized public policies could help further reduce teen drinking, and drinking at all ages.

These include increasing alcohol taxes, regulating how many alcohol outlets are allowed in communities, and implementing laws that hold bars and restaurants responsible for any mishaps that result from selling alcohol to minors or clearly intoxicated patrons, the report said.

"Those strategies focusing on the general population have been underutilized," Esser said. "If you work to change the environment, then you make healthier choices by default, and that can have an effect on [underage drinking](#)."

Pediatricians also can play a part by regularly screening their teenage patients for signs of [alcohol](#) or drug abuse, said Dr. Michael Grosso, chair of pediatrics and chief medical officer of Huntington Hospital, in New York.

"In this age group, medical illnesses are not for the most part the issue," Grosso said. "By far, the greatest health risks are attached to behaviors, whether they are sexual behaviors or other high-risk behaviors, especially substance abuse. In the limited time of an office visit, these issues need to be prioritized when we speak to the teenager or the parent."

The new study was in the May 11 issue of *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*, a CDC publication.

**More information:** Marissa Esser, Ph.D., health scientist, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Marcia Lee Taylor, president and CEO, Partnership for Drug-Free Kids; Scott Krakower, D.O., assistant unit chief, psychiatry, Zucker Hillside Hospital, Glen

Oaks, N.Y.; Michael Grosso, M.D., chair, pediatrics, and chief medical officer, Huntington Hospital, New York; May 11, 2017, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*

For more on underage drinking, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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