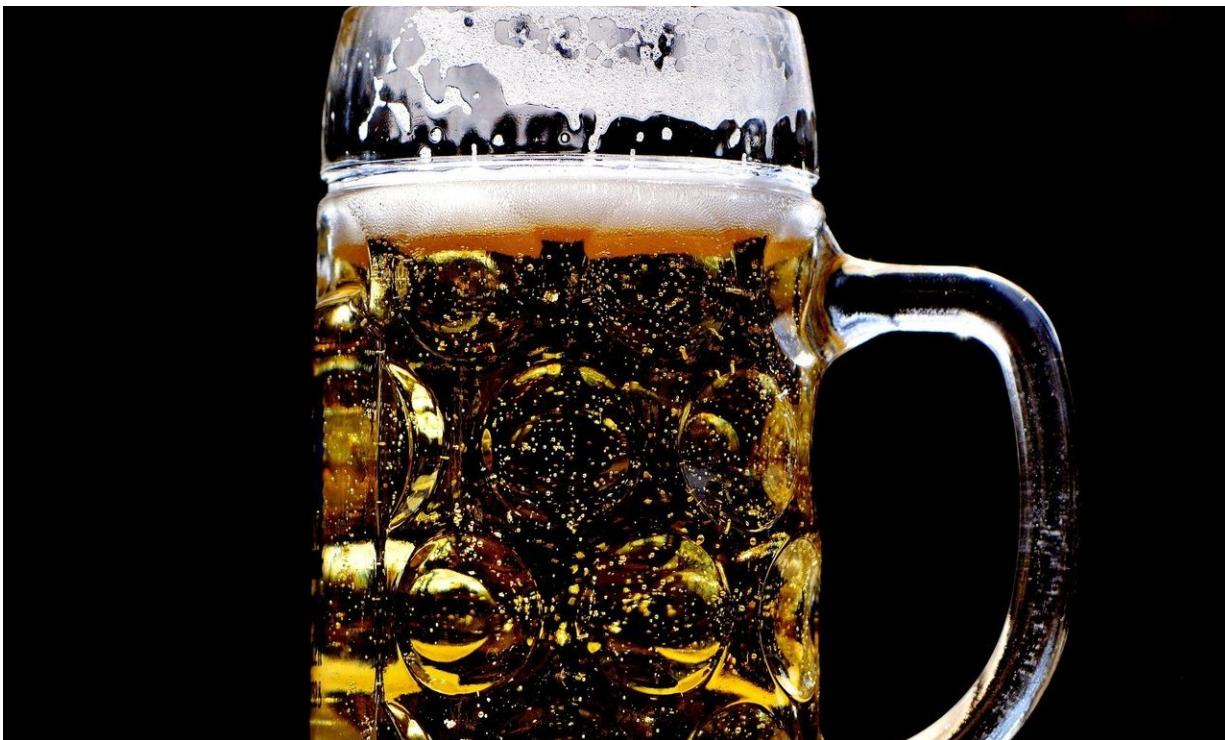


# Sharp decline in England youth drinking, new report shows

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A new report shows a sharp decline in youth drinking across all age groups over the last 15 years. Young people are now less likely to drink and, if they do drink, they start doing so later, drink less often and consume smaller amounts.

The report, published by the University of Sheffield's Alcohol Research Group, is part of a new project funded by the Wellcome Trust to examine and explain the decline in [youth drinking](#).

It analysed data from the 1988-2016 Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use amongst Young People in England surveys and the 2001-2016 Health Surveys for England. Both are nationally-representative surveys of [young people](#) in England and cover respondents aged between eight and 24.

The report shows that in 2002, 61 percent of 11-15 year-olds had previously consumed a full alcoholic drink but this dropped to 44 percent by 2016. For 8-12 year-olds, this fell from 25 percent to just four percent.

The proportion of 16-17 year-olds who reported drinking [alcohol](#) over the past 12 months fell from 88 percent in 2001 to 65 percent in 2016, while over the same time period, the proportion of 16-24 year-old drinkers fell from 90 percent to 78 percent.

Those young people who do drink are starting drinking up to a year later. Between 2002 and 2016, the average age at which 16-17 year-olds reported having their first alcoholic drink increased from 13.7 to 14.8, while for 11-15 year-olds it increased from 11.6 to 12.3.

The research showed there were also big falls in how often and how much young people drink.

Among those who were drinkers, the percentage of 16-24 year-olds who drank in the last week fell from 76 percent to 60 percent between 2002 and 2016, while for 11-15 year-olds it fell from 35 percent to 19 percent.

The proportion of 16-17 year-olds who exceeded binge drinking

thresholds in the last week fell from 30 percent in 2002 to six percent in 2016.

Dr. Melissa Oldham, lead author of the report from the University of Sheffield's Alcohol Research Group, said: "It may be that increases in internet use and online gaming are changing the way young people spend their leisure time.

"Economic factors may also play a role, as concern about increasing university tuition fees and the cost of housing means young people feel they have less disposable income to spend on alcohol."

As well as a decline in alcohol use, smoking and illicit drug use has also decreased amongst 11-15 year-olds.

The proportion of people smoking fell from 38 percent in 2002 to 17 percent in 2016 and the proportion of people using cannabis fell from 17 percent in 2002 to 11 percent in 2016.

Dr. John Holmes, who leads the University of Sheffield's study of the decline in youth [drinking](#), said: "These changes matter for public health today as young people suffer injuries, poor mental health and road traffic accidents when intoxicated.

"If this generation also drinks less in later adulthood, we may see big reductions in 20 or 30 years in the diseases caused by alcohol."

**More information:** Melissa Oldham et al. Youth Drinking in Decline. [www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_f...in\\_decline\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_f...in_decline_FINAL.pdf)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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