

Young women who reduce binge drinking could decrease risk of COVID-19 infection, study shows

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Women in their mid 20s who reported frequent binge drinking during the COVID-19 pandemic were more likely to become infected with COVID-19, according to Rutgers researchers who said physicians need to develop pandemic-related prevention methods to tackle substance use issues.

The study, published in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, found that young Black and [white women](#) ranging from ages 25 to 28 who reported [binge drinking](#)—four or more drinks in one sitting—had the highest self-reported prevalence of COVID-19 infection among the subgroups studied.

"Our research shows that when [young women](#) binge drink, they're also heightening their risk of contracting COVID-19. This can be due to several factors associated with binge drinking, such as being less vigilant in using preventive behaviors such as social distancing when intoxicated," said Tammy Chung, a professor of psychiatry and director of the Center for Population Behavioral Health at the Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research and a corresponding author in the study.

Researchers analyzed whether people's use of alcohol and substances changed from before the COVID-19 pandemic to during the pandemic in a sample of young Black and white women. They examined how characteristics such as [socioeconomic status](#) and COVID-19 infection status were associated with certain patterns of substance and [alcohol use](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study focused on young women, an understudied group whose [rates of substance use](#) are catching up to or matching that of men for most substances, because young women experience disproportionate financial strain because of job loss and increased caregiving responsibilities.

"Identifying these characteristic profiles can inform tailored intervention to address disparities associated with risk for COVID-19 infection and its intersection with specific patterns of substance use among young women to guide more personalized public health response," said Chung.

The study looked at seven subgroups of young women who showed similar patterns of substance use before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Groups included those with low use of substances, cannabis use, binge drinking, cigarette or e-cigarette use combined with binge drinking and other patterns.

Researchers also examined the characteristics that were associated with these patterns of substance use, such as socioeconomic status, COVID-19 infection status and COVID-19 impacts on mental health and financial situations.

Each subgroup correlated with a different response to COVID-19 impacts. Using the profiles of the subgroups, researchers could better understand how personal characteristics are associated with patterns of substance abuse. Researchers also found that individuals who reported using more than one drug were more likely to report pandemic-related psychological health and job or income loss.

"Women who report use of multiple substances warrant intervention not only for substance use, but also would benefit from mental health services and job or income-loss support," said Chung.

Future research could analyze subgroups of males, [women](#) who don't identify as Black or white and other age groups.

More information: Tammy Chung et al, Person-centered patterns of substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic and their associations with COVID-related impacts on health and personal finances in young

Black and White women, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2022.109620](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2022.109620)

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