

# Binge drinking five-plus drinks common for high school seniors, some drink more

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Consuming five or more alcoholic drinks in a row is common among high school seniors, with some students engaging in extreme binge drinking of as many as 15 or more drinks, according to a study published by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Alcohol consumption by [adolescents](#) is a public health problem in the United States. Binge drinking, commonly defined as four or more drinks for women and five or more drinks for men, can cause injury, impaired driving and [alcohol poisoning](#), as well as cause long-term risks such as liver damage, [alcohol dependence](#) and alterations to the developing brains of adolescents, according to the study background.

Megan E. Patrick, Ph.D., of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and colleagues examined the prevalence and predictors of binge drinking (five or more drinks) and extreme binge drinking (10 or more and 15 or more drinks in a row) in nationally [representative sample](#) of 16,332 [high school seniors](#) (52.3 percent female, 64.5 percent white, 11 percent black, 13.1 percent Hispanic and 11.5 percent of other race/ethnicity). A drink was defined as 12 ounces of beer, four ounces of wine, a 12-ounce wine cooler, a mixed drink or a shot glass of liquor.

According to the results, 20.2 percent of seniors reported binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row) in the past two weeks, while 10.5 percent reported consuming 10 or more drinks and 5.6 percent reported consuming 15 or more drinks.

Young men were more likely than young women to engage in all levels of binge drinking, as were white compared with [black students](#). Students whose parents were college educated had greater odds of binge drinking but lower odds of extreme binge drinking (15 or more drinks), the results indicate.

The authors note that while binge drinking, specifically, and the frequency of drinking, generally, have decreased among adolescents since record high levels in the late 1970s and early 1980s and have continued since 2005 to decrease, extreme binge drinking has not shown such declines since 2005, the study notes.

The authors suggest that further research may consider a broad range of family, school and community risk factors, as well as genetic and mental health indicators for binge drinking.

"The documented rates of extreme binge drinking, and the fact that they have not changed across recent historical time, support the need for additional research to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies to reduce high-risk alcohol behaviors of youth," the study concludes.

In an editorial, Ralph W. Hingson, Sc.D., M.P.H., and Aaron White, Ph.D., of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Bethesda, Md., write: "Research is needed to identify the predictors of extreme consumption of 15 or more drinks on an occasion and the consequences of this behavior, as well as ways to prevent such high-consumption occasions. Patrick et al identified several predictors."

"Numerous community interventions that are individual and parent oriented, school and web based and policy and multicomponent focused have been identified that can reduce binge drinking at conventionally defined [binge drinking](#) levels of five drinks or more per occasion," they

continue.

"Measures of extreme consumption [10 or more or 15 or more drinks] need to be routinely included in prevention studies so researchers can identify what types of interventions also reduce extreme drinking occasions or whether new approaches warrant investigation," they conclude.

**More information:** *JAMA Pediatr.* Published online September 16, 2013. [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.2392](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.2392)

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