



Making the Link

Underage Drinking and Girls' Health

Girls are beginning to drink at younger ages than ever before.

- ⇒ In the 1960's, 7 percent of new female users of alcohol were ages 10 to 14, but by the early 1990's, that figure had risen to 31 percent.¹
- ⇒ The 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health indicates that nearly 17 percent of girls ages 12 through 20 reported binge drinking.²

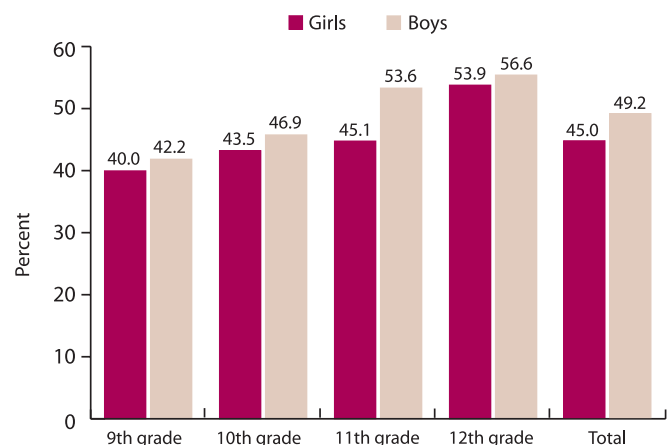
The gap between alcohol use by boys and girls is closing.

- ⇒ Among ninth graders, girls now binge drink at rates (23 percent) that are increasing and nearly equal to boys (26.2 percent).³
- ⇒ Smaller amounts of alcohol are more intoxicating to females, regardless of their size, because women absorb and metabolize alcohol differently than men.⁴

Drinking alcohol has serious consequences for girls' health.

- ⇒ Teenage girls who are heavy drinkers are five times more likely than nondrinkers to engage in sexual intercourse and a third less likely to use condoms, which can result in pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.⁵
- ⇒ Twelve- to sixteen-year-old girls who are current drinkers are four times more likely than their nondrinking peers to suffer depression.⁶
- ⇒ Among eighth grade girls who drink heavily, 37 percent report attempting suicide, whereas 11 percent of girls who do not drink report attempting suicide.⁷
- ⇒ Adolescent females who drink exhibit higher levels of estradiol (an estrogen) and testosterone than nondrinking girls. High levels of estrogen may contribute to increased risk for specific diseases, including breast cancer; high levels of testosterone are associated with an increased risk of substance use.⁸

Prevalence (%) of current drinkers by sex:
9th-12th graders, United States, 2001



Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2001. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Initiative Partners

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIH)

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Office of Research on Women's Health (NIH)

National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIH)

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DOJ)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (DHHS)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (DOT)

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. National Survey on Drug Use, Substance Abuse Among Women in the U.S. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2001. MMWR 51(SS04):1-64, 2002.

⁴ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol Alert, No. 46. Are Women More Vulnerable to Alcohol's Effects? Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1999.

⁵ The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. Substance Abuse and the American Woman. New York: Columbia University, June 1996.

⁶ Hanna EZ, Hsiao-ye Y, Dufour MC, et al. The relationship of drinking and other substance use alone and in combination to health and behavior problems among youth ages 12-16: Findings from the Third National Health and Nutrition Survey (NHANES III). Poster presented at the 23rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the Research Society on Alcoholism, June 24-29, 2000, Denver, CO.

⁷ Windle M, Miller-Tutzauer C, Domenico D. Alcohol use, suicidal behavior, and risky activities among adolescents. J Res Adolesc 2(4):317-330, 1992.

⁸ Martin CA, Mainous AG, Curry T, et al. Alcohol use in adolescent females: Correlates of estradiol and testosterone. Am J Addict 8(1):9-14, 1999.