

Newsroom

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New Nationwide Report Estimates that 40 Percent of Underage Drinkers Received Free Alcohol from Adults Over 21

Survey reveals that 650,000 underage drinkers in the past month were given alcohol by their parents or guardians

More than 40 percent of the nation's estimated 10.8 million underage current drinkers (persons aged 12 to 20 who drank in the past 30 days) were provided free alcohol by adults 21 or older, according to a nationwide report by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The study also indicates that one in 16 underage drinkers (6.4 percent or 650,000) was given alcoholic beverages by their parents in the past month.

"In far too many instances parents directly enable their children's underage drinking – in essence encouraging them to risk their health and wellbeing," said Acting Surgeon General Steven K. Galson, M.D., M.P.H, a rear admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service. "Proper parental guidance alone may not be the complete solution to this devastating public health problem – but it is a critical part."

The report is based on a nationwide study which for the first time asked detailed questions about the behavior and social situations involved in underage drinking – a problem responsible for the deaths of more than 5,000 people under the age of 21 every year in the United States. The survey asked persons aged 12 to 20 about the nature and scope of their drinking behavior as well as the social conditions under which they drank.

"This report provides unprecedented insight into the social context of this public health problem and shows that it cuts across many different parts of our community," said SAMHSA Administrator Terry Cline, Ph.D. "Its findings strongly indicate that parents and other adults can play an important role in helping influence – for better or for worse -- young people's behavior with regard to underage drinking."

Among the report's more notable findings:

- More than half (53.9) of all people aged 12 to 20 engaged in underage drinking in their lifetime, ranging from 11.0 percent of 12 year olds to 85.5 percent of 20 year olds.
- An average of 3.5 million people aged 12 to 20 each year (9.4 percent) meet the diagnostic criteria for having an alcohol use disorder (dependence or abuse).
- About one in five people in this age group (7.2 million people) have engaged in binge drinking – consuming five or more drinks on at least one occasion in the past month.

- The vast majority of current underage drinkers (80.9 percent) reported being with two or more people the last time they drank. Those who were with two or more people consumed an average of 4.9 drinks on that occasion, compared with 3.1 drinks for those who were with one other person and 2.9 drinks for those who were alone.
- Among youths aged 12 to 14 the rate of current drinking was higher for females (7.7 percent) than males (6.3 percent), about equal for females and males among those aged 15 to 17 (27.6 and 27.3 percent, respectively), and lower for females than males among those aged 18 to 20 (47.9 vs. 54.4 percent).
- Over half (53.4 percent) of underage current alcohol users were at someone else's home when they had their last drink, and 30.3 percent were in their own home; 9.4 percent were at a restaurant, bar or club.
- Rates of binge drinking are significantly higher among young people living with a parent who engaged in binge drinking within the past year.

The findings from this study are being incorporated into the Underage Drinking Prevention campaign, an ongoing public outreach effort by the Office of the Surgeon General, SAMHSA and the Ad Council encouraging parents to speak with their children early and often about the negative effects of underage drinking. The campaign provides parents with valuable information about the problem of underage drinking as well as tips for how to talk to their children about it. Further information about the campaign can be obtained at: <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov>.

Underage Alcohol Use: Findings from the 2002-2006 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health is based on combined data from the 2002 to 2006 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) involving responses from 158,000 people age 12 to 20 throughout the United States. The survey is based on a scientific random sample of households throughout the United States, and professional field representatives personally visit each household to conduct the survey.

The full report is available on the Web at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/underage2k8/toc.htm>. Copies may be obtained free of charge by calling SAMHSA's Health Information Network at 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727). Request inventory number SMA 08-4333. For related publications and information, visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/>.

SAMHSA is a public health agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is responsible for improving the accountability, capacity and effectiveness of the nation's substance abuse prevention, addictions treatment, and mental health services delivery system.
