



# FACTS on College Student Drinking

## FAST FACTS

- Of the 15 million students enrolled in college in 2016, 9 million were under age 21, the U.S. minimum legal drinking age.<sup>1</sup>
- Alcohol use increases as college students near the legal drinking age. In 2017, 37 percent of 18-year-old college students and half of all 20-year-olds reported using alcohol each month.<sup>2</sup>
- High blood alcohol concentrations and impairment levels associated with binge drinking place those who binge drink and those around them at a substantially elevated risk for negative consequences, such as motor vehicle crashes, injuries, unsafe sexual practices, and sexual victimization.<sup>3</sup>
- Alcohol contributes to an estimated 1,519 deaths per year among college students.<sup>4</sup>

\*Current drinking = past-30-day use. In 2015, SAMHSA redefined binge drinking as five or more drinks for men and four or more drinks for women on the same occasion on at least one day in the past 30 days. Heavy alcohol use = binge drinking on five or more days in the past 30 days.

**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

## COLLEGE DRINKING OVERVIEW

Full-time college students tend to drink more than others in their age group. In 2017, 54 percent of full-time college students reported any alcohol use, 35 percent reported engaging in binge drinking, and 10 percent reported heavy drinking during the past 30 days. Among individuals ages 18 to 22 not enrolled full time in college, the percentages were 48 percent, 33 percent, and 9 percent, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

Many students come to college with established drinking habits. Among 12th graders in 2017, 56 percent reported alcohol use and 37 percent reported having been drunk at least once during the year.<sup>6</sup>

Risk of alcohol abuse appears greater among some college groups. For example, fraternity or sorority membership, particularly for young men who reside in fraternities, has been associated with a greater than average increase in binge drinking and marijuana use during college.<sup>7,8</sup> Individual rates of binge drinking and marijuana use for fraternities and sororities may differ across college campuses. Among student athletes, 42 percent reported binge drinking within the last 12 months in 2017. More than one-quarter of student athletes reported having a hangover, experiencing memory loss, and/or doing something they regretted after drinking.<sup>9</sup>

## BINGE AND HEAVY DRINKING BY GENDER

In 2017, 36 percent of full-time male college students and 34 percent of female college students ages 18 to 22 reported binge drinking during the past 30 days. Eleven percent of male students and 9 percent of female students reported heavy drinking.<sup>10</sup>

Based on 2017 data, about 16 percent of male college students ages 19 to 22 reported having 10 or more drinks in a row at least once, compared to 7 percent of females. Sixteen percent of males reported having 15 or more drinks in a row in the past two weeks, compared to 7 percent of females.<sup>11</sup>

## ALCOHOL USE CONSEQUENCES

About one-quarter of college students report having negative academic consequences because of their drinking, including missing class, falling behind in their studies, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.<sup>12</sup>

Each year, among college students ages 18 to 24:

- An estimated 696,000 students are assaulted by another student who has been drinking;
- An estimated 599,000 students under the influence of alcohol are unintentionally injured;
- 22,219 students are hospitalized for an alcohol overdose;
- 967 students die in alcohol-related traffic crashes; and
- An estimated 2 million students drive under the influence of alcohol.<sup>13,14</sup>

## ALCOHOL USE PREVENTION

In a 2010 survey of 351 four-year colleges, 98 percent of colleges used educational programs to address student drinking, and 50 percent offered intervention programs that were effective with students at high risk for alcohol problems. Few colleges reported that empirically supported, community-based alcohol control strategies (e.g., compliance checks, mandatory responsible beverage service training, or restrictions on alcohol outlet density) were operating in their community.<sup>15</sup>

A large-scale study involving 14 California campuses found that environmental prevention strategies that target settings where students most often engage in heavy drinking appear to significantly reduce the incidence and likelihood of intoxication among college students. The environmental interventions included nuisance party enforcement operations, minor decoy operations, driving under the influence checkpoints, social host ordinances, and use of campus and local media to increase the visibility of the prevention measures.<sup>16</sup>

For more information about underage drinking prevention, visit [www.StopAlcoholAbuse.gov](http://www.StopAlcoholAbuse.gov), the web portal of the Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking.

Visit the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's CollegeAIM website ([www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/CollegeAIM/Default.aspx](http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/CollegeAIM/Default.aspx)) for a matrix-based decision tool that organizes what is known about college drinking interventions by factors such as the strength of the research evidence and ease of implementation.

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