

## Teens binge drink, government study finds

*Tue Jan 2, 8:44 AM ET*

Nearly half of all U.S. high-school students admit to recently drinking alcohol illegally, and most of them were binge drinkers, according to a government survey published on Tuesday.

These binge drinkers -- who had five or more drinks in a row -- were more likely to have sex, fight, smoke or use drugs, the study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found.

"Our study clearly shows that it's not just that students drink alcohol, but how much they drink that most strongly affects whether they experience other health and social problems," said Dr. Jacqueline Miller of the CDC's Alcohol Team, who led the study.

"It also underscores the importance of implementing effective strategies to prevent underage and binge drinking, such as enforcing the minimum legal drinking age and reducing alcohol marketing to youth, which can help us change social norms regarding the acceptability of underage and binge drinking."

Across the United States, the minimum drinking age is 21, while most teens leave high school by age 17, 18 or 19.

Writing in the journal *Pediatrics*, the CDC team said they analyzed data from 15,214 high-school students (aged 14 to 18) who completed the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

They found that 45 percent of the students admitted having drunk alcohol in the past month. Of these, 64 percent were binge-drinkers.

And the binge drinkers were not simply experimenting -- 69 percent reported having done so more than once in the past 30 days.

Teen drinkers in general were more than twice as likely to be sexually active as non-drinkers, the researchers found.

They were more than four times as likely to smoke cigarettes and more than twice as likely to have been in a physical fight, the researchers found. These rates went up even higher for binge drinkers, they reported.

The binge drinkers were more than five times as likely as non-drinkers to be sexually active, more than 18 times as likely to smoke cigarettes, and more than four times as likely to have been in a physical fight. They were also far more likely to smoke marijuana and attempt suicide, the researchers said.

Drinkers also did more poorly in school, according to the survey.

Among other studies on teenage alcohol use, in September the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that 16.5 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds admitted to drinking. That study included students younger than high school age.

The 2006 Monitoring the Future survey, done by the University of Michigan and published in December, found that 75 percent of 12th graders, the oldest high school students, had tried alcohol.