Binge Alcohol Use among Persons Aged 12 to 20: 2002 and 2003 Update

In Brief

● In 2002 and 2003, approximately 7.2 million persons (19.2 percent) aged 12 to 20 were past month binge alcohol users.

● Binge alcohol use rates for persons aged 12 to 20 were among the lowest in Utah (13.7 percent) and among the highest in North Dakota (32.5 percent).

● Among persons aged 12 to 20 who reported past month binge alcohol use, approximately half (50.6 percent) reported binge alcohol use on 3 or more days per month.

Research has shown that persons who engage in binge alcohol use as teenagers are at increased risk for binge drinking as young adults. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks respondents aged 12 or older to report their frequency and quantity of alcohol use during the month before the survey. NSDUH defines binge alcohol use as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. All findings presented in this report are annual averages based on combined 2002 and 2003 NSDUH data.

Prevalence of Binge Alcohol Use

In 2002 and 2003, approximately 7.2 million (19.2 percent) persons aged 12 to 20 reported past month binge alcohol use. Adults aged 21 or older were more likely to be binge alcohol users than persons aged 12 to 20 (23.4 vs. 19.2 percent). The...
percentage of persons aged 12 to 20 who were binge alcohol users increased with age, from 0.8 percent of 12 year olds to 40.1 percent of 20 year olds (Figure 1).

Males aged 12 to 20 and 21 or older were more likely to be binge alcohol users in the past month than females of the same age (Figure 2). Females aged 12 to 20 were more likely to have engaged in binge alcohol use than females aged 21 or older, while males aged 12 to 20 were less likely to have engaged in binge drinking than males aged 21 or older.

State Estimates of Binge Alcohol Use

Binge alcohol use rates for persons aged 12 to 20 were among the lowest in Utah (13.7 percent) and among the highest in North Dakota (32.5 percent). The Southeast and West Coast States had lower rates of binge alcohol use than States in other regions. Figure 3 illustrates State differences in the rate of binge alcohol use among persons 12 to 20 years old. States with the highest estimates fall into the top quintile (fifth) and are shown in red; States with the lowest estimates are in the bottom quintile and are shown in blue.

Frequency of Past Month Binge Alcohol Use among Binge Drinkers Aged 12 to 20

Among persons aged 12 to 20 who engaged in binge alcohol use in the past month, males did so on more days than females. Binge drinking on 3 or more days in the past month was reported by 56.1 percent of males compared with 43.4 percent of females (Figure 4).

Among binge drinkers aged 12 to 20, 49.3 percent reported binge alcohol use on 1 or 2
days in the past month, 18.7 percent reported 2 or 3 days, 11.5 percent reported 5 or 6 days, and 20.5 percent engaged in binge drinking on 7 or more days in the past month. Among past month binge alcohol users, 55.2 percent of those aged 18 to 20, compared with 43.1 percent of those aged 12 to 17, engaged in binge drinking on 3 or more days in the past month (Figure 4).

End Note


Figure Notes

* NSDUH defines binge alcohol use as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.

Source: SAMHSA, 2002 and 2003 NSDUH.