

# The Role of Peers on Alcohol Use among Minnesota Students

## Drinking among students in 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade

Binge drinking is defined as four or more drinks for females, or five or more drinks for males, within about two to three hours. Although past-month drinking and binge drinking have declined slightly in recent years, 13.4% of 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students currently drink, and 5.2% currently binge drink (**Figure 1**).

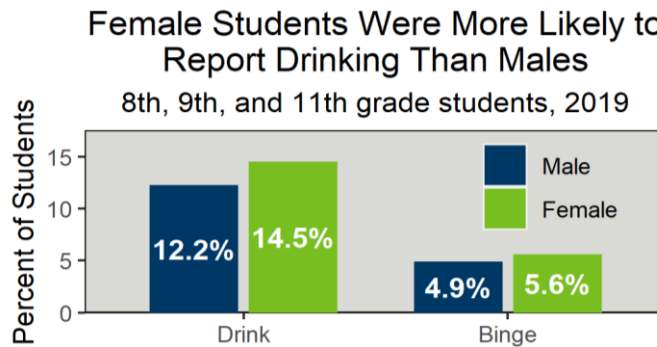


Figure 1: Drinking and binge drinking rates among male and female students in 2019 show that females drink and binge drink at a higher rate than males.

## Students overestimate the drinking rates of their peers

Studies have shown that students routinely overestimate the frequency at which their peers consume alcohol, which can indirectly encourage more drinking [1,2]. Based on findings from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey, students in Minnesota also overestimate the frequency at which their peers drink (**Figure 2**).

### Students Overestimate the Drinking Rates of Their Peers

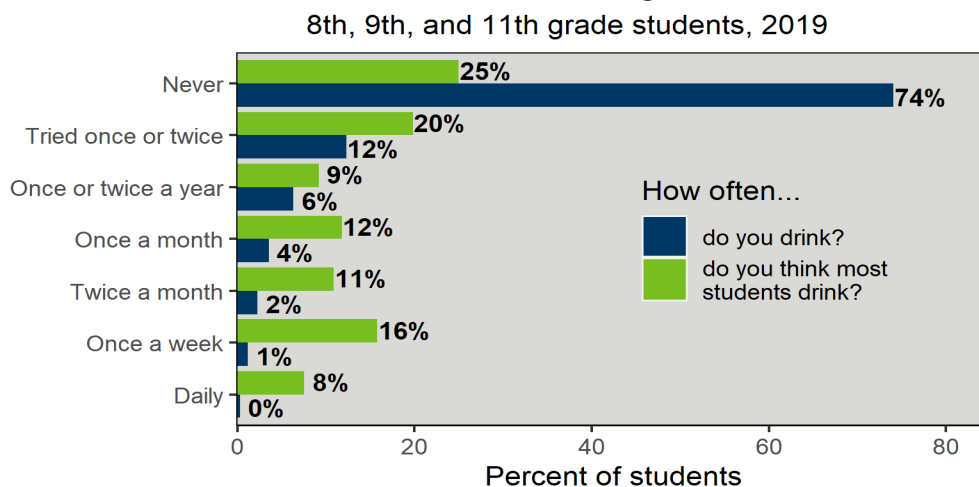


Figure 2: Comparison between student drinking frequency and the frequency students think their peers drink in 2019.

## The influence of a student's peers on drinking

Research has shown that young people are influenced by their friends' use and views of alcohol [3]. Compared with students who believe that their peers do not currently drink, students who believe that most of their peers currently drink alcohol are:

- 4.4 times more likely to report drinking any alcohol in the past 30 days
- 4.2 times more likely to binge drink in the past 30 days.

Friends can also be protective factors and help to reduce the chances of alcohol use. In 2019, compared with students who have friends that do not think it is wrong/very wrong to consume alcohol nearly every day, students who have friends who think it is wrong/very wrong to consume alcohol nearly every day are:

- 2.7 times less likely to drink any alcohol
- 3.9 times less likely to binge drink.

In 2019, 72% of students said they have friends who care quite a bit or very much about them, while 29% said they did not. Having supportive friends who think drinking is wrong is associated with significant reductions in alcohol use, including among students who believe that most of their peers drink at least once a month.

## Conclusions

In Minnesota, students' perceptions of their peers' alcohol use is associated with their own drinking behavior. Students tend to overestimate their peers' drinking behavior; therefore, informing students that others their age actually drink less than they think may decrease feelings of peer pressure to drink [4]. Data also show that students are open to suggestions from their friends when it comes to drinking, suggesting that students may influence one another's drinking behaviors. Increased implementation and enforcement of effective population-level alcohol policies may also prevent alcohol use among students in Minnesota. For more information, see [The Community Guide Excessive Alcohol Consumption \(https://www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/excessive-alcohol-consumption\)](https://www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/excessive-alcohol-consumption).

## Methods

The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) is administered every three years to students across Minnesota to create a comprehensive data set about the health and well-being of Minnesotan students. Students in grades five, eight, nine, and 11 are included, and all types of school districts are invited to participate (for more information see The [Minnesota Student Survey \(https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/mss/\)](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/mss/)). All data presented comes from the 2019 MSS, and students in grades eight, nine, and 11 were considered. Missing or NA data was assigned a value of 0 or 'False'. Odds ratios were determined by performing logistic regression on the presented explanatory variables' influence on drinking or binge drinking, while accounting for demographic factors including sex, race, grade, and age.

## References

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3. Brown SA, McGue M, Maggs J, et al. A developmental perspective on alcohol and youths 16 to 20 years of age. *Pediatrics*. 2008; 121 Suppl 4:S290-310.

4. Cox MJ, DiBello AM, Meisel MK, Ott MQ, Kenney SR, Clark MA, Barnett NP. Do misperceptions of peer drinking influence personal drinking behavior? Results from a complete social network of first-year college students. *Psychol Addict Behav.* 2019; 33(3):297–303.

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