

# ALCOHOL USE AMONG BOYS

**F**rom the time they first use alcohol, males and females drink differently. Boys tend to drink more heavily and more often than girls, and face more drinking-related problems as a result.<sup>1</sup>

## PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL USE IN BOYS AGES 12 TO 17

- According to SAMHSA's 1998 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 19 percent of boys ages 12 through 17 reported using alcohol in the past month.<sup>2</sup>
- Boys under 17 drink more heavily than any other population group: nearly 3 in 10 (29 percent) consume six or more alcoholic beverages each time they drink, compared to 24 percent of 18- and 19-year-olds.<sup>3</sup>
- White non-Hispanic boys, ages 12 to 17, reported the highest levels of lifetime, past year, and past month usage of alcohol. Hispanic boys follow closely behind, with black non-Hispanic boys reporting the lowest levels.<sup>4</sup> About 22 percent of white non-Hispanic boys used alcohol in the past month, compared with 20 percent for Hispanic boys and nearly 17 percent for black non-Hispanic boys.<sup>5</sup>

## SOME RISK FACTORS FOR BOYS WHO USE ALCOHOL

- Boys may be more susceptible than girls to a family history of alcoholism.<sup>6</sup> Boys whose fathers are alcoholics appear to suffer from higher levels of anxiety and, upon

drinking, experience greater stress relief and appear to be less sensitive to alcohol's intoxicating and impairing effects than sons of non-alcoholics.<sup>7</sup>

- Boys also develop attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at higher rates than girls; ADHD is a strong predictor of early-onset drinking problems.<sup>8</sup>
- Thirty percent of high-school aged boys who were sexually or physically abused reported they were current drinkers (had at least one drink in the past month) or heavy drinkers (had five or more drinks in a row on at least 5 different days in the past month), compared with 16 percent of non-abused boys.<sup>9</sup>

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The average age of boys who first try alcohol is 11 years.<sup>10</sup>
- Teenage boys who drink take more risks than girls. They are more likely to engage in binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks in a row), to drink before or during school, to use marijuana in conjunction with alcohol, and to drink and drive.<sup>11</sup> Boys who drink are also prone to fighting<sup>12</sup> and sexual aggression.<sup>13</sup>



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- Compared to female adolescent drinkers, males get drunk more often and suffer more negative consequences, such as trouble with police and criticism from friends.<sup>14</sup>
- Among male high school students, 39 percent say it is acceptable for a boy to force sex with a girl who is drunk or high.<sup>15</sup>
- Adolescent males who drink take greater sexual risks than females, including having multiple sexual partners and having sex with strangers.<sup>16</sup>
- Sports sell. Beer commercials are more effective among teenage boys when they include references to sports.<sup>17</sup>
- In one study, the leading reason boys gave for drinking was to have fun—in spite of the actual consequences, which can be far from enjoyable.<sup>18</sup> Among frequent drinkers, boys are twice as likely as girls to say that they drink because they do not believe they will live long enough to face the risks.<sup>19</sup>
- Teenage boys are also more likely to drive after binge drinking than males or females of any age.<sup>20</sup>

For comparative information, please see SAMHSA's Alcohol Use Among Girls fact sheet.

## SOURCES

- <sup>1</sup> Donovan, J.E., "Gender differences in alcohol involvement in children and adolescents: a review of the literature," in Howard, J.M., Martin, S.E., Mail, P.D., Hilton, M.E., and Taylor, E.D. (eds.), *Women and Alcohol: Issues for Prevention Research*, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Research Monograph No. 32, Bethesda, MD, 1996.
- <sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings 1997*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999.
- <sup>3</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, "Survey of Teen Alcohol Consumption," Washington, DC, September 1998.
- <sup>4</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings 1997*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> McGue, M. "Genes, environment, and the etiology of alcoholism," *Development of Alcohol Problems: Exploring the Biopsychosocial Matrix of Risk*, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Research Monograph No. 26, Bethesda, MD, 1994.
- <sup>7</sup> Finn, P., and Justus, A., "Physiological responses in sons of alcoholics," *Alcohol Health and Research World: Children of Alcoholics*, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Bethesda, MD, 1997.
- <sup>8</sup> Crime Times: Research Reviews and Information on Biological Causes of Criminal, Violent, and Psychopathic Behavior, "ADHD: Risk for early drug, alcohol abuse." <sup>9</sup> The Commonwealth Fund, *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Boys*, New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1997.
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Public Health Service, *Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990.
- <sup>11</sup> Ellickson, P., et al., "Teenagers and alcohol misuse in the United States: by

any definition, it's a big problem," *Addiction*, 91:(10), 1996. <sup>12</sup> Valois, R.F., et al., "Correlates of aggressive and violent behaviors among public high school adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 16(1):1995. <sup>13</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, *College Students and Drinking*, Alcohol Alert No. 29, July 1995. <sup>14</sup> Huselid, R.F., and Cooper, M.L., "Gender roles as mediators of sex differences in adolescent alcohol use and abuse," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Volume 33, 1992. <sup>15</sup> Office of the Inspector General, *Youth and Alcohol: Dangerous and Deadly Consequences*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1992. <sup>16</sup> Derman, K.H., and Cooper, M.L., "Sex-related alcohol expectancies among adolescents: Prediction of drinking in social and sexual situations," *Psychology of Addictive Behavior*, Volume 8(3): 1994. <sup>17</sup> Slater, M.D., et al., "Male adolescents' reactions to TV beer advertisements: the effects of sports content and programming context," *Journal of Studies of Alcohol*, 57(4):1996. <sup>18</sup> The Commonwealth Fund, *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Boys*, New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1997. <sup>19</sup> The Commonwealth Fund, *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Boys*, New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1997. <sup>20</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Driving After Drug or Alcohol Use Report*, Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998.

SAMHSA, a public health agency in the Department of Health and Human Services, is the Federal Government's lead agency for improving the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment, and mental health services in the United States. Further information about SAMHSA is available on the Internet at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).