

# >>ALCOHOL STATISTICAL BULLETIN

self reported behaviours of  
secondary school students NSW 1999  
**alcohol**

This statistical bulletin is part of a series of bulletins and reports on the results of a survey conducted in 1999 of NSW secondary school students aged 12 to 17 years. The aim of the survey was to provide up-to-date data on the prevalence of smoking, drinking and illicit drug use, sun protection behaviours, physical activity, injury, eating patterns and criminal offences.

## Key trends

Between 1996 and 1999:

- there was stability in most indicators of alcohol consumption
- the proportion of students who reported they had drunk alcohol in the week prior to the survey remained at 34% for males and 29% for females
- the incidence of hazardous drinking decreased for males (34% in 1996; 28% in 1999) and remained stable for females (35% in 1996; 36% in 1999).

## Alcohol consumption amongst young people – what we are doing

Alcohol consumption amongst young people is a concern that is being addressed through a range of different policy and program initiatives. NSW Health, NSW Department of Gaming and Racing and NSW Department of Education and Training initiatives include:

- As an initiative of the NSW Drug Summit Government Plan of Action 1999, the Drug Programs Bureau of NSW Health has developed the policy framework for a whole-of-government approach to the problem of alcohol consumption by young people. The NSW Youth Alcohol Action Plan 2001-2005 outlines the Government's commitment and approach to preventing and reducing

alcohol use and associated harm among young people between 12 and 24 years. The Plan outlines a range of strategic responses including government, specific departmental, non-government and local ways to support young people to reduce and prevent harm associated with alcohol.

- An Underage Drinking Prevention Program conducted by the Department of Gaming and Racing comprises various initiatives including: a range of resources for young people, parents, the general community and the liquor industry to raise awareness about the underage drinking laws; promotion of strategies to reduce underage drinking in the community, such as alcohol-free entertainment for under 18s.
- Education about alcohol is part of the mandatory Personal Development, Health and Physical Education key learning area for students from kindergarten to year 10 in NSW schools. At the appropriate age, students explore choices related to alcohol use, influences on decision making to use alcohol, and outcomes and consequences of alcohol use and misuse. Strategies to minimise harm are also taught, including assertiveness and refusal skills. Students in years 11 and 12 in government schools study Crossroads, a personal development and health education course which explores drug issues with an emphasis on binge drinking, polydrug use, alcohol and driving, and the effect of alcohol use on employment.

## Research methodology

The target population for the survey comprised all students enrolled in school years 7 to 11 in government and non-government schools across NSW and the sample was designed to match this population. Survey data were gathered in a core and two supplementary self-completion questionnaires. Each supplementary questionnaire was answered by approximately half of the core sample. The survey

# >>ALCOHOL

was administered in schools by external research staff. Students were randomly selected and had no prior working knowledge of the contents of the survey.

A total of 122 NSW schools participated with a total of 7,544 students from years 7 to 11 taking part in the survey. Students whose essential information (age and gender) was missing or who were outside the 12 to 17 year age range were excluded, leaving a final sample size of 7,475. All results reported in this bulletin are for students aged 12 to 17 years. The NSW survey is part of the Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug Survey 1999.

## Terminology

### *Recent drinker*

Students who reported drinking alcohol on at least one day in the week prior to the survey.

### *Ever drunk alcohol*

Students who reported having consumed at least part of an alcoholic drink in their lifetime.

### *Hazardous drinking*

Is defined as three or more standard drinks on any one occasion for females, and five or more drinks on any one occasion for males.<sup>1</sup>

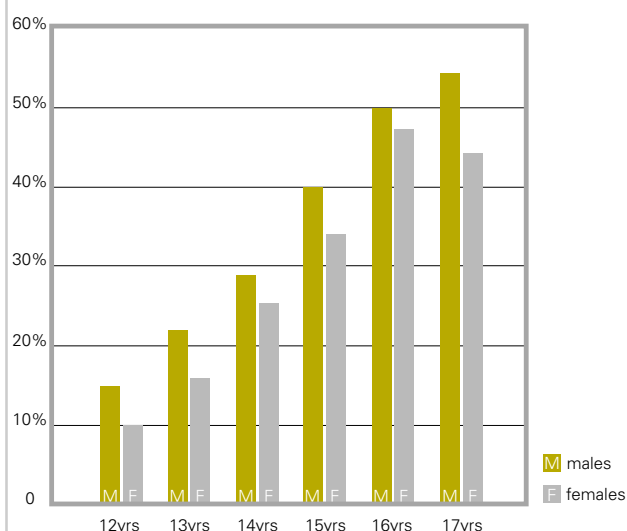
## Prevalence of alcohol consumption

- Across all age groups, 88% of males and 85% of females reported ever drinking at least part of an alcoholic drink, although for 32% of males and 35% of females this was only 'a few sips'.
- More males reported recent drinking than females at all ages. Overall, 34% of males and 29% of females were recent drinkers.
- There were substantial age differences in these figures with about 13% of 12-year-olds reporting recent drinking

compared to about 50% of 17-year-olds. There were also gender differences: at 12 years 15% of males and 10% of females were recent drinkers, and at 17 years 54% of males and 44% of females were recent drinkers. Even so, 45% of males (75% at 12 years and 21% at 17 years) described themselves as 'non-drinkers' as did 51% of females (84% at 12 years and 26% at 17 years). Only 2% of males and 0.5% of females described themselves as 'heavy drinkers'.

- Recent drinking increased between the ages of 12 and 17 years for males, and between the ages of 12 and 16 years for females.

Figure 1  
Recent drinking by age and gender

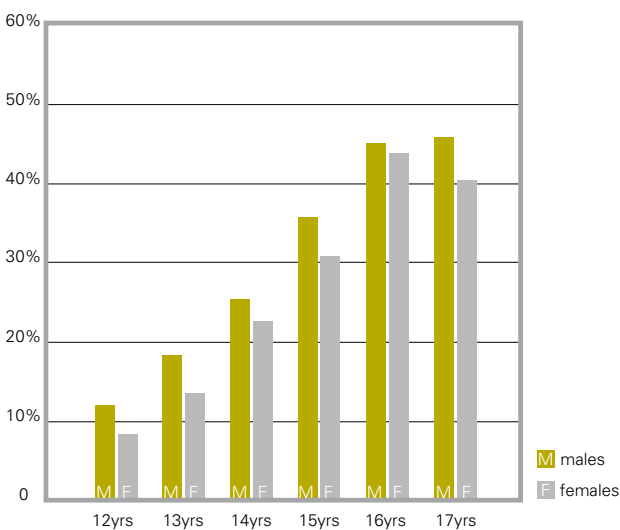


<sup>1</sup> The definition of 'hazardous drinking' used in this Bulletin follows the 1992 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines. These refer to what is considered biologically 'hazardous' in terms of chronic consumption by adults and do not define levels of drinking that are hazardous to the short or long-term health of school-age young people. The term 'hazardous drinking' equates also to the term 'binge drinking', according to these guidelines. During 2000, the NHMRC reviewed these guidelines and after extensive nationwide consultation has produced Australian Alcohol Guidelines: Health Risks and Benefits which have modified the terminology considerably ([www.nhmrc.health.gov.au/publications/synopses/ds9syn.htm](http://www.nhmrc.health.gov.au/publications/synopses/ds9syn.htm) accessed November 2001). These reservations should be considered when reading the results of this survey.

## Number of days per week students drank alcohol

- Overall, approximately 16% of students aged 12 to 17 years drank alcohol on two or more days a week, with 1% drinking daily. Among recent drinkers, 52% drank on two or more days in the last week and 15% drank daily.
- Drinking was related to particular days of the week. Overall, 20% drank on Friday, 33% on Saturday and 17% on Sunday, compared to less than 8% on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.
- For females, 9% drank on weekdays (Monday to Thursday) and 26% drank at the weekend (Friday to Sunday); for males, 13% drank on weekdays and 30% at the weekend. For both males and females, weekend drinking peaked at 16 and 17 years (females 44% and 40%; males 45% and 46% for 16 and 17 year olds respectively).

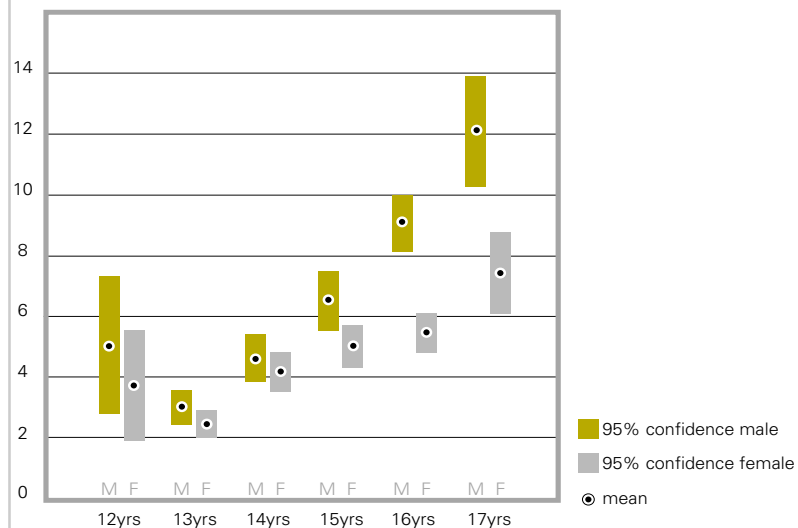
Figure 2  
Percentage of weekend drinkers



## Number of alcoholic drinks consumed

- The number of alcoholic drinks consumed in the week prior to the survey increased for every age group over 13 years for males and for females. Males reported a greater number of drinks than did females and the overall increase from 12 to 17 years is greater for males than females.
- The steep increase between 15 and 17 years in the number of alcoholic drinks consumed by males is noteworthy. For females, there was little increase between 15 and 16 years, but a similar gradient to males between 16 and 17 years, although at a lower level.

Figure 3  
Number of alcoholic drinks consumed per week (mean and 95% confidence limits)

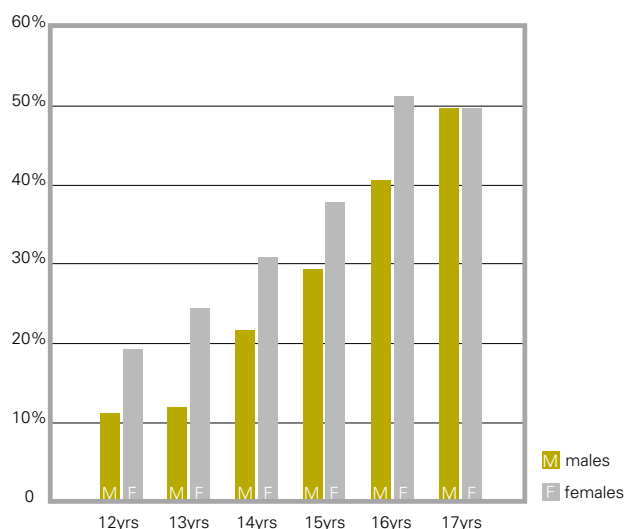


NB. Data for 12-year-olds may be unreliable due to exaggerated reporting in this age group.

## Hazardous drinking

- Overall, approximately one third of students reported that they had engaged in hazardous drinking behaviour in the two weeks preceding the survey.
- For males, 28% reported drinking five or more standard drinks on any one occasion and for females, 36% reported drinking three or more standard drinks on any one occasion. (23% of females reported drinking five or more standard drinks on any one occasion)
- The incidence of hazardous drinking appears to increase with age, with half of all 17-year-olds drinking hazardously in the fortnight preceding the survey.

Figure 4  
Hazardous drinking in the past two weeks



## Source of alcohol

- Overall, 17% of males and 12% of females reported that they had tried to buy alcohol in a hotel, club, restaurant, nightclub or bottleshop (5% of 12 to 13-year-olds; 40% of 17-year-olds).
- Of those who had tried to buy alcohol, 62% of males and 48% of females said that they had been refused service. The majority said that they had been refused at bottleshops (26% males; 22% females). Approximately 29% of females and males had been refused at a hotel, and 21% of females and 13% of males at a restaurant.
- Those who had tried to purchase alcohol were asked if they had been asked to show proof of age or identification when entering and/or asking for alcohol at a hotel, club, restaurant, nightclub or bottleshop. 62% of males and 64% of females said they had been asked for proof of age or identification. The majority had been asked at a bottleshop (72% males; 61% females). This corresponds to the result for refusal of service. Of those who had asked for identification, approximately 25% had used a friend's proof of age, fake learner's/driver's licence, fake proof of age or fake identity at least once.
- Of those who did purchase their last drink, the main sources were walk-in bottleshops (25% males and females), hotels, pubs or taverns (23% males; 18% females) and drive-in bottleshops (17% males; 14% females).
- The most common source for students who did not buy their own alcohol was via a second party sale or supply i.e. obtained from parent/s (44% males; 40% females), given by a friend (20% males; 25% females) and bought by someone else on respondent's behalf (15% males; 16% females). The proportion who took their last drink from home without parents' permission was relatively low (5%).

## Type of alcoholic drink

- The types of drinks most frequently cited by respondents as their usual drink were beer (43% males; 16% females), spirits (30% males; 29% females), alcoholic sodas (13% males; 27% females), and wine (13% males and females).

## Place of drinking

- The most common places for drinking alcohol were at home (39% males; 34% females), at a party (27% males; 33% females) and at a friend's home (13% males and females). Hotels, clubs and restaurants were mentioned by a significantly smaller percentage of students.

## Trends in the prevalence of alcohol consumption

Figure 5  
Trends in the prevalence of male recent drinkers 1984 to 1999

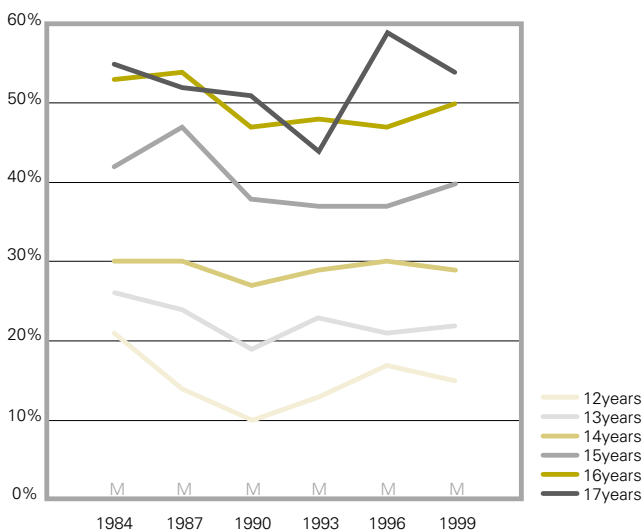
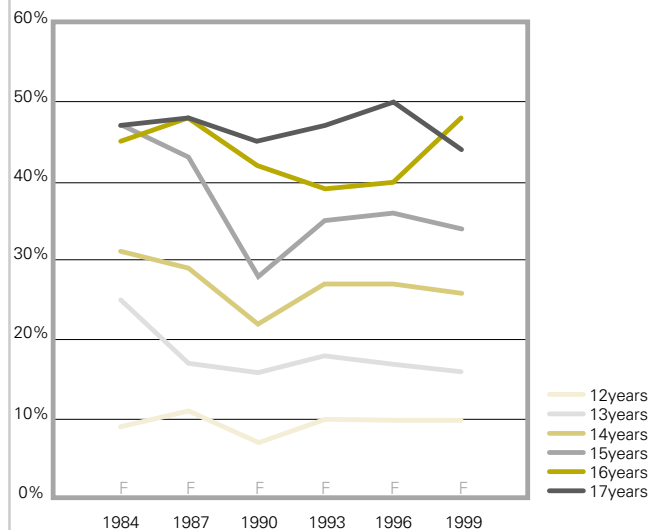


Figure 6  
Trends in the prevalence of female recent drinkers 1984 to 1999



- A comparison of 1999 results with the previous 1996 survey results suggests there was stability in most indicators of alcohol consumption. Overall, 34% of males and 29% of females were recent drinkers in both the 1996 and 1999 survey.
- Overall, the incidence of hazardous drinking decreased for males (34% in 1996; 28% in 1999). This decline was recorded in all male age groups. For females, the rates of hazardous drinking have remained stable (35% in 1996; 36% in 1999).
- Between 1996 and 1999 there was an increase in the proportion of students drinking alcoholic sodas. This increase was largely attributable to females aged 16 and 17 years. Over all age groups, alcoholic soda was drunk by 8% of students in 1996 and by 16% in 1999 (males 5% increasing to 8%; females 12% increasing to 22% for 1996 and 1999 respectively).

- The most common drink for males aged 17 years in 1996 was beer (63%; females 16%). In 1999 this decreased to 51% for males and 10% for females. The most common drink for females of the same age in 1996 was spirits (37%; 22% in 1999). Percentages of males aged 17 whose most common drink was spirits were 22% in 1996 and 20% in 1999.

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