

DRINKING PATTERNS

among secondary school students

SUMMARY

- An increasing proportion of secondary school students are choosing not to drink
- Among drinkers, secondary school students are drinking alcohol less frequently (greater reductions between 2007-2012 than 2012-2019)
- Binge drinking in the past month remains high among older secondary school students (42% among those aged 17+ years and 29% among 16 year olds in 2019)
- In 2019, more than one in four drinkers (28%) reported consuming 5-9 drinks in a typical drinking occasion; not changing over time. Around one in fourteen (14%) drinkers reported typically consuming 10+ drinks.

THE YOUTH2000 SURVEYS

The Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey (Youth19) is the fourth health and wellbeing survey in the Youth2000 series, following surveys in 2001, 2007 and 2012. Details about surveys and the research methods behind this factsheet are available elsewhere.¹

BACKGROUND

The harms from drinking alcohol for young people can be both short and long term and irreversible (e.g. negative impacts on brain development²). For a number of reasons, **young people are at a higher risk of harm from alcohol use** than older age groups.³

Harms to young people from using alcohol include injury and accidents, unprotected and unwanted sex, assault, and having performance at school or work affected.⁴ The more alcohol harms they experience, the less likely they are to finish high school.⁵ Young people also have a heightened vulnerability to addiction - almost 50% of cases of alcohol abuse and dependence in Aotearoa New Zealand are developed by the age of 20 years.⁶

The Ministry of Health recommends that children and young people under 18 years do not drink any alcohol. Those under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking alcohol and not drinking in this age group is especially important. If 15 to 17 year olds do drink alcohol, they should be supervised, drink infrequently and at levels below and never exceeding the adult daily limits.⁷

YOUNG NON-DRINKERS

The proportion of secondary school students reporting never having consumed alcohol (not more than a few sips) has **increased significantly** over time (adjusted for age, sex, deprivation level, and ethnicity). The prevalence of non-drinking is similar in boys and girls and across school deciles. In 2007, 28% of students in the most deprived school deciles (deciles 1-2) and 28% of students in the least deprived deciles (deciles 9-10) had never consumed alcohol. In 2019, this increased to 52% in the most deprived school deciles and 46% in the least deprived school deciles.

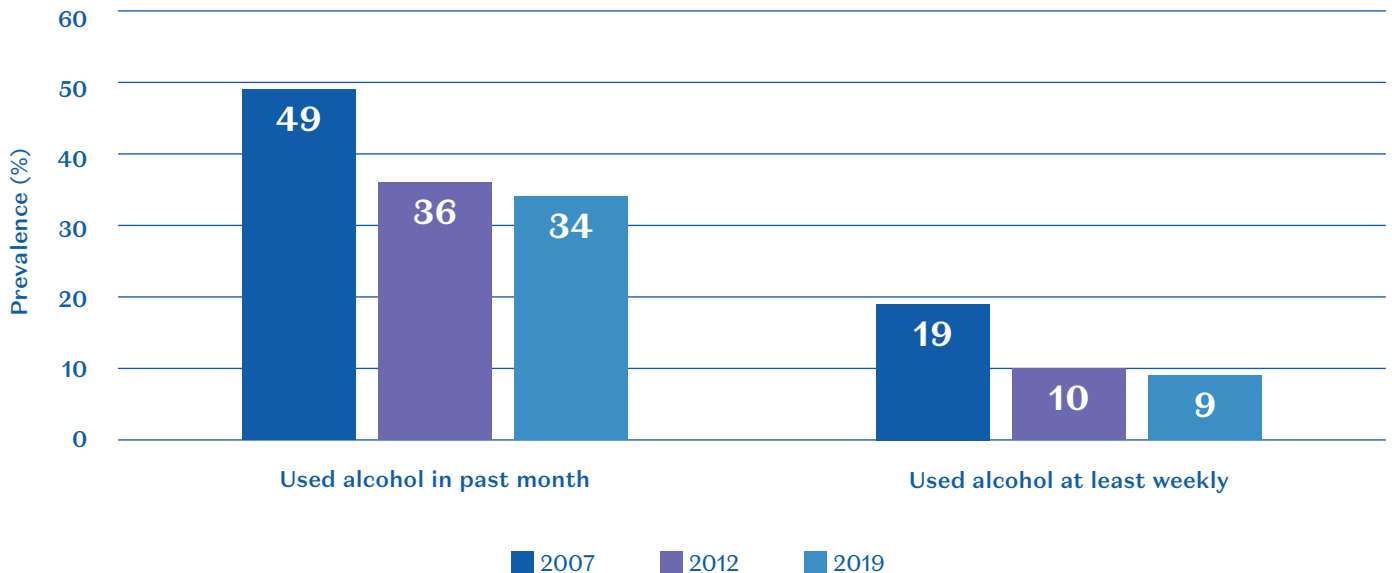
The proportion of secondary students who have never drunk alcohol (more than a few sips) increased markedly from 26% in 2007, to 39% in 2012, and to 45% in 2019.

Increases in the proportion never drinking have been greatest among younger students, suggesting a delay in drinking uptake. Never drinking increased from 34% in 2007 to 60% in 2019 among those aged under 16 and from 14% to 26% among students aged 16 years and over in the same time period.

HOW OFTEN ARE YOUNG PEOPLE DRINKING?

Over time, young people are **drinking less often**. However, most of the declines in drinking frequency occurred between 2007 and 2012 as changes between 2012 and 2019 are not statistically significant. Again, the changes have been greater among younger students.

Figure 1. Frequency of alcohol use, among all secondary school students.

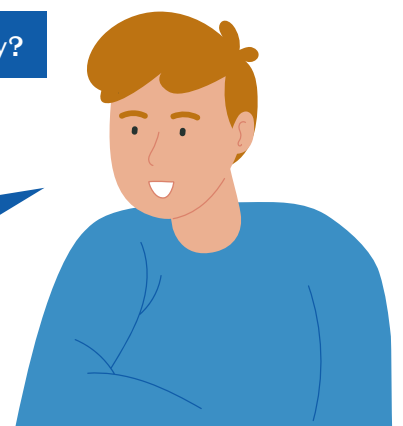


In 2019, the frequency of using alcohol did not differ significantly by neighbourhood deprivation quintile, school decile, or gender.

What do you think are the biggest problems for young people today?

“The culture of drinking to get drunk and seeing alcohol and drugs as the only way to have a good time”

– Northland, European Male, 17 years, NZDep 6



BINGE DRINKING

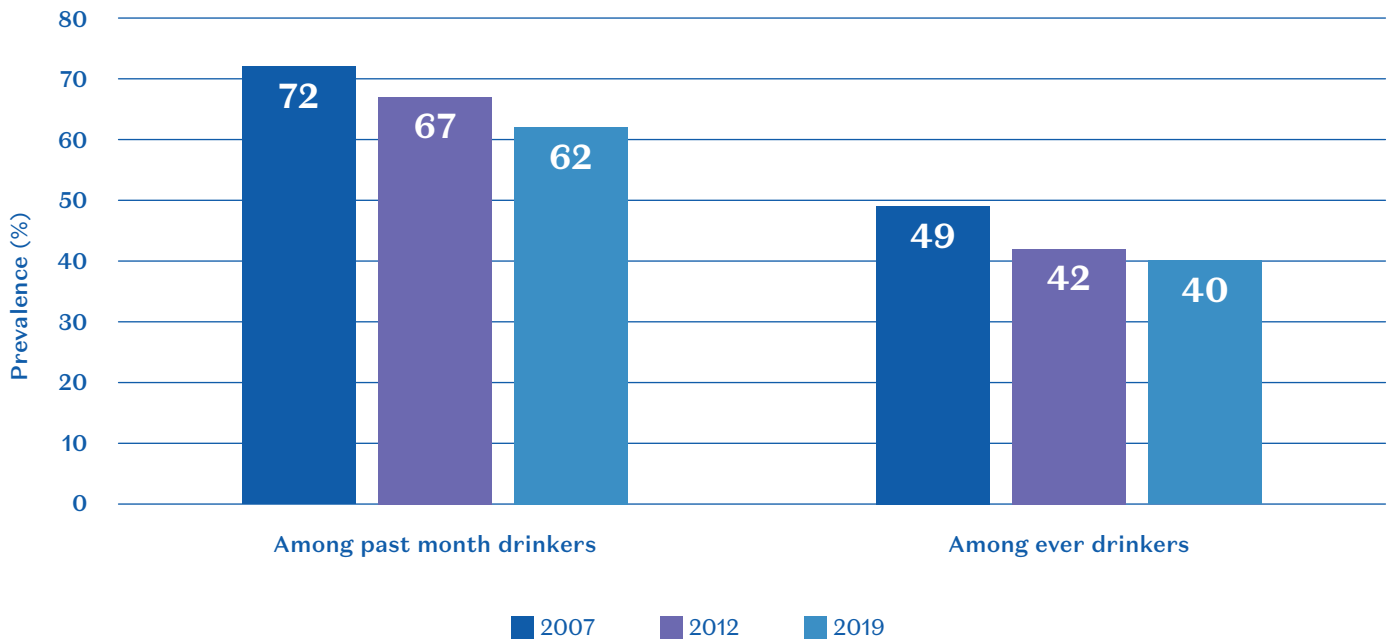
In the Youth'19 survey, binge drinking is defined as drinking five or more drinks in a session in the past month.

Among the total student population, **binge drinking fell markedly** between 2007 and 2019 - from 36% to 22%. This is partly because fewer students reported drinking alcohol. There was little difference between the genders in the prevalence of past month binge drinking in 2019 (boys 23%; girls 21%).

Among ever drinkers and past month drinkers, there was a smaller decline in binge drinking between 2007 and 2019 (from 49% to 40%, and from 72% to 62%, respectively). The decline in binge drinking among ever drinkers between 2012 and 2019 was not statistically significant.

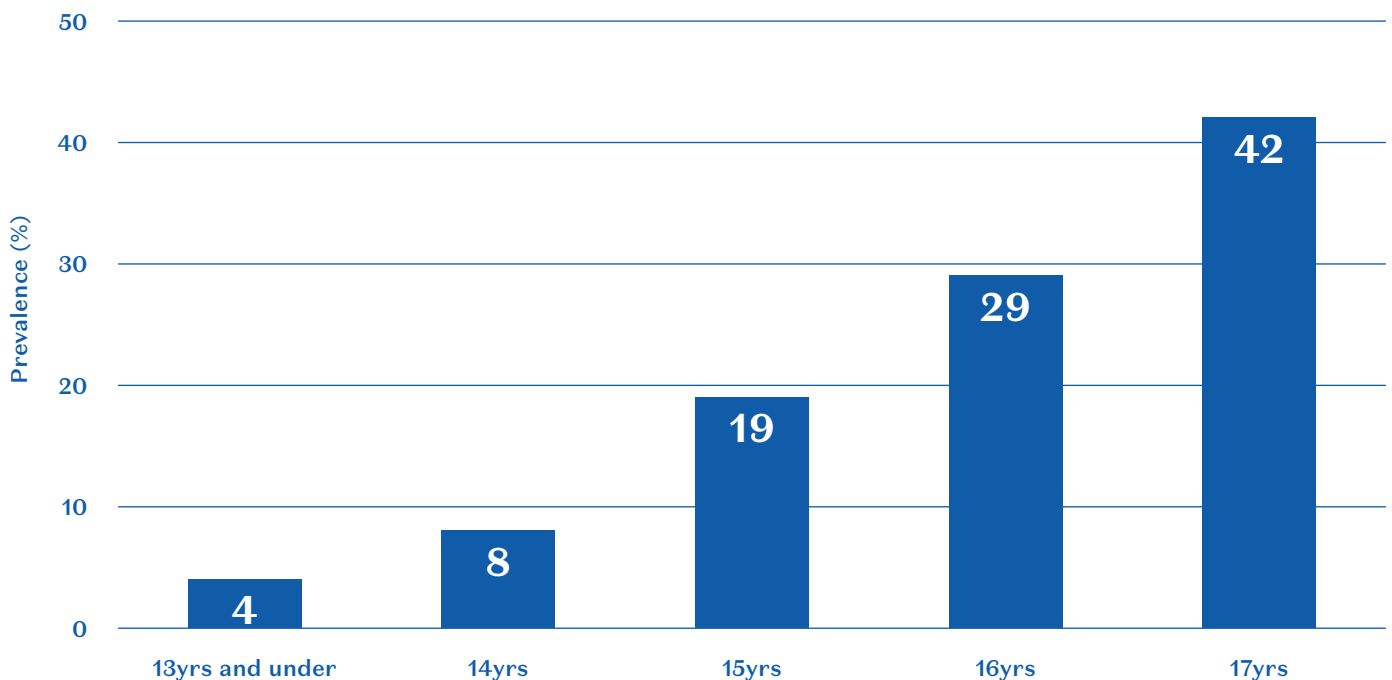
In 2019, well over half of past month drinkers (62%) engaged in binge drinking - showing that it remains a dominant drinking pattern among students.

Figure 2. Prevalence of past month binge drinking, among ever drinkers and past month drinkers.



In 2019, the prevalence of binge drinking increased sharply with age. Of those aged 13 and under, 4% reported binge drinking, increasing to 42% among those aged 17 and over.

Figure 3. Prevalence of past month binge drinking by age, 2019.



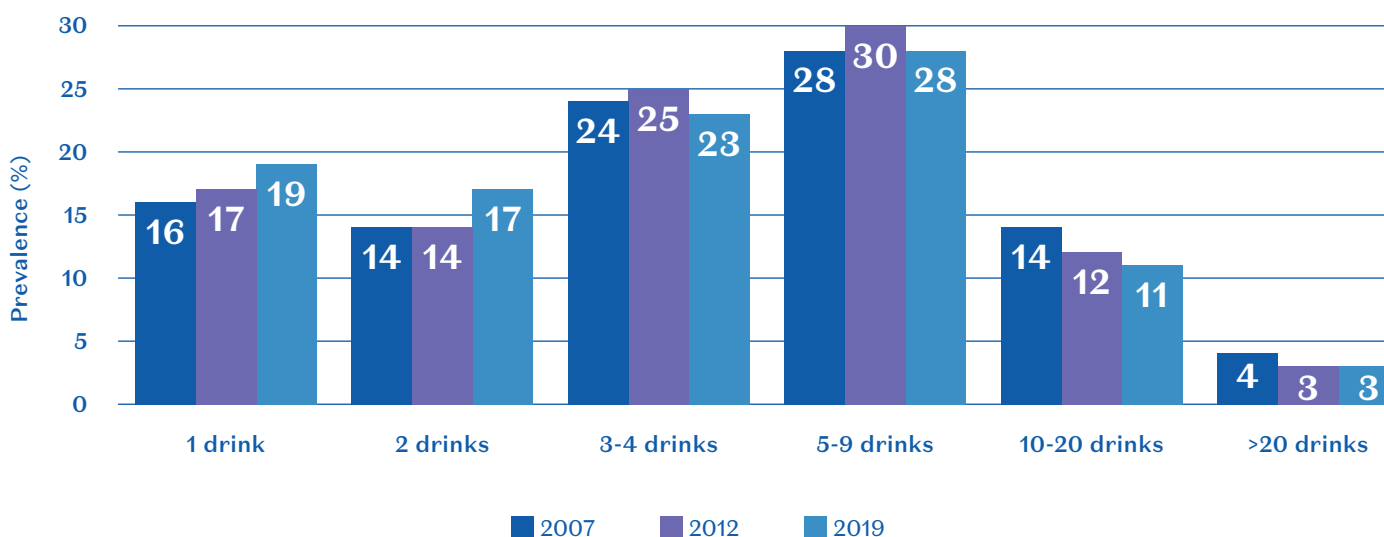
AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL TYPICALLY CONSUMED

In 2019, more than one in four (28%) current drinkers reported consuming five to nine drinks on a typical drinking occasion. This has **not changed over time**. Current drinkers were defined as students who continue to drink (at the time of the survey), beyond their first experience with alcohol.

A high proportion of young people reported drinking more than the recommended adult limit (two standard drinks per day for females and three for males⁶) in all survey years. One in ten current drinkers reported typically consuming 10-20 drinks in an occasion - higher among boys (16%) than girls (6%).

From 2007 to 2019, significant (unadjusted) reductions in very heavy drinking occurred. For example, 18% of current drinkers reported drinking 10 or more drinks per session in 2007, decreasing to 14% in 2019. The proportion typically consuming 1-2 drinks increased from 30% to 36% in the same period.

Figure 4. Quantity of alcohol consumed on a typical occasion, among current drinkers.



IMPLICATIONS

Although the proportion of adolescents who drink has declined over time, binge drinking remains the typical style of drinking among adolescent drinkers. Effective approaches to reduce alcohol use among adolescents include evidence-based policies that address the low price of alcohol, its high availability and pervasive advertising.⁸ Educational, fact-based programmes are generally ineffective for this age group, unless they are part of a whole-of-school, comprehensive and on-going approach to critical learning.⁹

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the rangatahi who took part in the survey and the schools and families who supported them – without all of you there would be no survey. We enormously appreciate your time, openness and energy. Thank you to the Youth19 investigators and researchers who ran the survey and contributed to this analysis and to the Adolescent Health Research Group who have carried out the Youth2000 Survey Series with thousands of students over 20 years. The data analysis and development of this factsheet have been supported by a nib foundation Health Smart Grant.

REFERENCES

- 1 Ball, J., Zhang, J., Kim, A., Crengle, S., Farrant, B., Jackson, N. (2022) Addressing Alcohol Harm in Adolescents. Technical Report 1: Methods and overview of findings. Wellington: University of Otago. Available at www.youth19.ac.nz/publications
- 2 de Goede J, van der Mark-Reeuwijk KG, Braun KP, et al. Alcohol and brain development in adolescents and young adults: A systematic review of the literature and advisory report of the health council of the Netherlands. *Advances in Nutrition* 2021; 12: 1379–410.
- 3 National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. Canberra: Australia: Author.
- 4 Health Promotion Agency. Understanding alcohol use and subsequent harms in young people. An evidence summary. Wellington, N.Z.: Author, 2020.
- 5 Silins E, Fergusson DM, Patton GC, et al. Adolescent substance use and educational attainment: An integrative data analysis comparing cannabis and alcohol from three Australasian cohorts. *Drug Alcohol Depend* 2015; 156: 90–6.
- 6 Rapsey CM, Wells JE, Bharat MC, Glantz M, Kessler RC, Scott KM. Transitions through stages of alcohol use, use disorder and remission: Findings from Te Rau Hinengaro, The New Zealand Mental Health Survey. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 2018; 54: 87–96.
- 7 Alcohol - alcohol intake guidelines. Wellington, N.Z., 2022.
- 8 The SAFER technical package: five areas of intervention at national and subnational levels. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO
- 9 Lee NK, Cameron J, Battams S, Roche A. What works in school-based alcohol education: A systematic review. *Health Education Journal* 2016; 75: 780–98.