

The Role of Peers in Alcohol Use Among Youth in Minnesota

About one in 10 Minnesota youth reported drinking alcohol in the past month, and about 4% reported binge drinking (i.e., more than four drinks on an occasion for females, and more than five drinks for males) in 2022. As of 2022, female students in the 11th grade were the most likely to report engaging in alcohol-related behaviors such as current alcohol use (19%) and binge drinking (8%).

Female students were more likely to report alcohol use than male peers

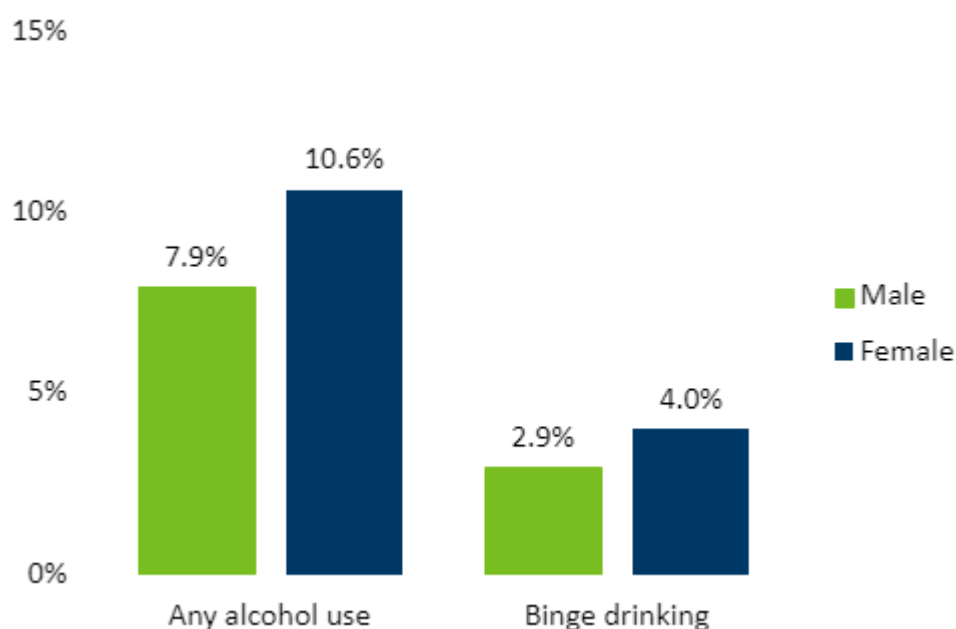


Figure 1: Percentage of female and male students in grades 8, 9, and 11 who report any alcohol use in the last 30 days and binge drinking (i.e., >4 drinks on an occasion for females, and >5 drinks for males) in the last 30 days.

Perceptions of drinking among peers

Research has shown that students overestimate how often their peers drink alcohol, which may indirectly influence students to initiate alcohol use, drink alcohol more often, or binge drink.^{1,2} In Minnesota, about 11% of students in grades 8, 9, and 11 think that their peers, or other students, drink alcohol once a week, however less than 1% of students reported drinking alcohol once a week.

Students also underestimate the proportion of their peers who choose to avoid alcohol use. In fact, while 75% of students reported having never tried alcohol, only 35% of students believed their peers have never tried alcohol. Figure 2 depicts additional comparisons in how often Minnesota students in grades 8, 9, and 11 report drinking alcohol and how often they think their peers, or other students, drink alcohol.

Students underestimate how many of their peers do not drink alcohol and overestimate how often their peers drink alcohol

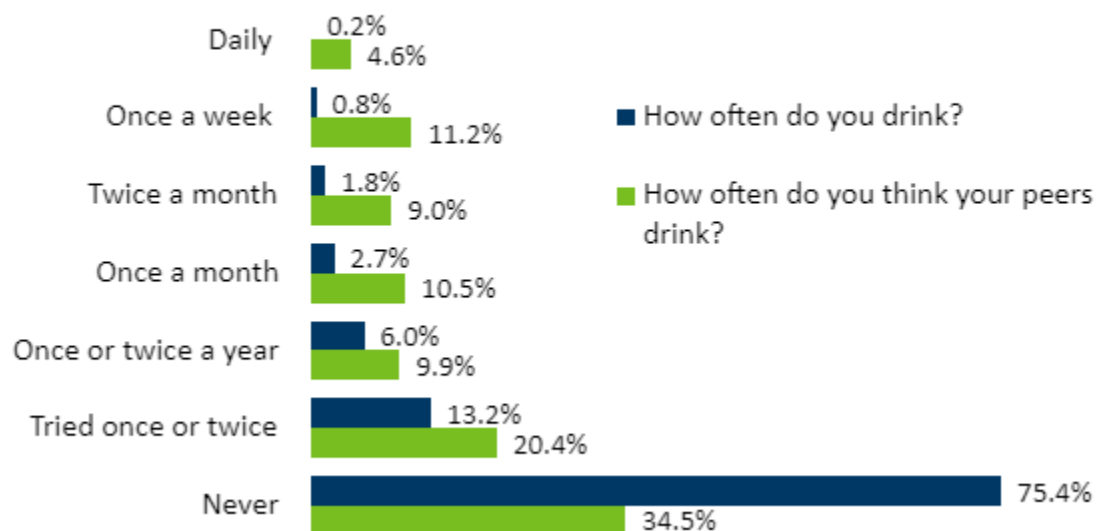


Figure 2: Comparison of reported student drinking frequency and the frequency that students perceive their peers drink in 2022.

The influence of peers on drinking

Peer influence is one of the strongest predictors for alcohol-related behaviors among youth.³ For example, young people can be influenced by their friends' or peers use of alcohol or opinion on alcohol use.⁴ In fact, students who believe that most of their peers consume alcohol at least once a month, compared to students who think most of their peers have never consumed alcohol are:

- 3.8 times more likely to report drinking any alcohol in the past 30 days
- 4.8 times more likely to report binge drinking in the past 30 days

Friends can also be protective factors and help to reduce the chances of alcohol use. For example, students who have friends who think it is wrong or very wrong to consume alcohol nearly every day, compared to students who said their friends have a more permissive attitude toward alcohol, were about 70% less likely to report any alcohol use and 76% less likely to report binge drinking in the last 30 days.

The influence of parents and caregivers on drinking

Peer influences on youth drinking behaviors may vary based on whether a young person is already vulnerable to alcohol use as a result of parent or caregiver influences.⁵ For example, parents or guardians may model alcohol-related behaviors such as heavy or binge drinking or increase opportunities for youth to consume alcohol.⁵⁻⁷

In Minnesota, students who reported living with someone who drinks too much alcohol were 3.3 times more likely to report current alcohol use.

Recommendations

Peers and parents/guardians are key influencers on adolescent alcohol use behaviors. Students often overestimate how many of their peers, and how often their peers engage in alcohol use, and these perceptions may influence their own alcohol use or decision to initiate alcohol use.⁸ Parents and guardians can influence drinking behaviors among youth through modeling or increasing access or opportunities to consume alcohol (i.e. providing alcohol and tolerance of alcohol use).

Youth alcohol use prevention efforts should consider involving parents and caregivers.⁵ There are evidence-based strategies to decrease alcohol use among youth and protect them from alcohol related harms. Some of which include:

- Decreasing availability of alcohol by regulating alcohol outlet density or limit the number of alcohol retailers such as bars and restaurants in an area.⁹
- Increasing the price of alcohol (i.e. raising taxes on alcohol to increase price).⁹
- Enhanced enforcement of alcohol-related laws, such as [Social Host Ordinance in Minnesota](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/alcohol/documents/socialhostbrief.pdf) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/alcohol/documents/socialhostbrief.pdf>).

Resources

- [CDC – Preventing Underage Drinking with Community Strategies](https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/underage-drinking/community-strategies.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/underage-drinking/community-strategies.html>)
Provides proven ways communities can prevent underage drinking and protect youth from alcohol-related harms.
- [CDC – Preventing Excessive Alcohol Use with Proven Strategies](https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/prevention/proven-strategies.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/prevention/proven-strategies.html>)
Provides evidence-based findings and resources to prevent excessive use and alcohol-related harms.

Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)

This data brief reports on alcohol use among youth as measured by the [2022 Minnesota Student Survey](https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/mchs/surveys/mss/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/mchs/surveys/mss/index.html>). The Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) is a survey of 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade students in all participating school districts in the state. Participation was voluntary and surveys were anonymous. School district participation rates was 70% in 2022.¹⁰

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