

# Underage Drinking in the United States: A Status Report, 2005

March 2006

The Center on  
Alcohol Marketing and *Youth*



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## Preface

This report on underage drinking in the United States by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University:

- summarizes the most recent data and other relevant research on underage drinking, with special focus on findings published in 2005;
- focuses and advances our current understanding of underage drinking; and
- seeks to prompt action to protect our children from underage drinking and its tragic consequences.

Specifically, this report examines:

- the scope and consequences of underage drinking in the United States;
- how youth get access to alcohol, and how this can be prevented;
- how alcohol appeals to youth, including the extent to which youth are exposed to, aware of and influenced by alcohol advertising;
- promising approaches to protect our youth.

## Executive Summary

### **Alcohol use among young people under 21 is the leading drug problem in the United States.**

- More youth in the United States drink alcohol than smoke tobacco or marijuana, making it the drug most used by American young people.<sup>1</sup>
- Every day, 5,400 young people under 16 take their first drink of alcohol.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2005, one out of six eighth-graders, one in three tenth-graders, and nearly one out of two twelfth-graders were current drinkers.<sup>3</sup>
- More than 7 million underage youth, ages 12 to 20, reported binge drinking – having five or more drinks on at least one occasion in the past 30 days – in 2004, according to data released in September 2005.<sup>4</sup>

### **Girls are binge drinking more.**

- Girls are binge drinking more, according to all three federal surveys, while boys are bingeing less or increasing their bingeing at a slower rate than their female peers.<sup>5</sup>
- At the same time, twelfth-grade female drinkers and binge drinkers are now more likely to drink distilled spirits than beer.<sup>6</sup>
- The new “alcopops” are particularly attractive to girls, and most popular with the youngest drinkers.<sup>7</sup>

### **Underage drinking has serious consequences.**

- Every day, three teens die from drinking and driving.<sup>8</sup>
- At least six more youth under 21 die each day of non-driving alcohol-related causes, such as homicide, suicide, and drowning.<sup>9</sup>
- More than 70,000 college students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape each year.<sup>10</sup>
- Recent studies have found that heavy exposure of the adolescent brain to alcohol may interfere with brain development, causing loss of memory and other skills.<sup>11</sup>

### **Underage youth continue to find alcohol easily accessible.**

- According to a national study released in 2005, more than 60% of eighth graders and over 80% of tenth graders said it was fairly easy or very easy to obtain alcohol.<sup>12</sup>
- A 2005 study conducted for the American Medical Association found that nearly half of all teens surveyed said they in fact had obtained alcohol.<sup>13</sup>

### **Youth exposure to alcohol advertising is substantial.**

- For instance, on television from 2001 to 2004, the average number of alcohol ads seen by young people ages 12 to 20 per capita in the course of the year grew from 209 to 276, an increase of 32%.<sup>14</sup>
- The 15 television shows in 2004 with the largest audiences of teens aged 12 to 17 all had alcohol ads.<sup>15</sup>

### **Long-term studies have shown that youth who see, hear, and read more alcohol ads are more likely to drink and drink more heavily than their peers.<sup>16</sup>**

- The first national long-term study of youth throughout the United States, funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, found that for underage youth, exposure to an additional alcohol ad was correlated with a 1% increase in drinking, and that youth drank 3% more for every additional dollar per capita spent on alcohol advertising in a local market.<sup>17</sup>
- This study comes on the heels of two other long-term federally-funded studies as well as a variety of studies from other countries that, taken together, present an increasingly compelling picture that alcohol marketing has an effect on young people’s drinking.<sup>18</sup>

### **Much more needs to be done.**

- Despite the widespread use of alcohol among underage youth and its devastating consequences, efforts to limit easy access and widespread appeal of alcohol products to youth remain underfunded and limited.
- Stronger policies, increased federal and state actions and resources, and more industry responsibility and accountability are needed if we are to reduce and prevent the tragic consequences of underage drinking.

## I. UNDERAGE DRINKING: ENORMOUS PROBLEM, STALLED PROGRESS

*"My alcohol abuse, though dangerous, was not unprecedented.... You can find girls who abuse alcohol anywhere. We are everywhere. Of the girls I've known over the past nine years, the ones who took shots, did keg stands, toppled down stairs, passed out on sidewalks, and got sick in the backseats of cabs, there have been overachievers, athletes, dropouts, artists, snobs, nerds, runway models, plain-Janes, and so-called free-thinkers..."*

– Koren Zailckas, author of *Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood*, Viking Penguin, New York, New York, 2005.<sup>19</sup>

Largely as a result of all 50 states having passed laws prohibiting the purchase of alcohol by persons under 21 by 1988, youth alcohol use declined substantially in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, however, underage drinking has remained relatively flat and at high levels, according to a major report issued by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine.<sup>20</sup> Long-term data collected by the University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future survey finds that trends show a modest decline between 2001 and 2005, but the rate of decline is slow, and smaller than the decreases reported for illicit drug use.<sup>21</sup>

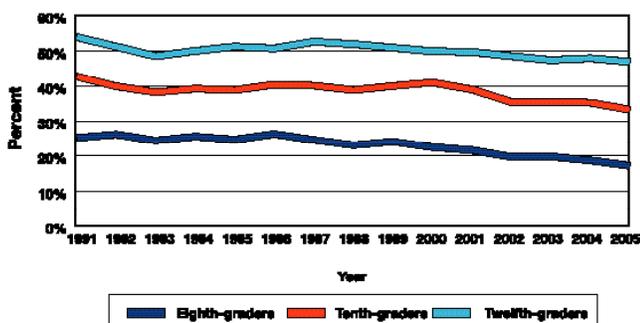
Major findings released in 2005 regarding underage drinking include the following:

### The prevalence of alcohol use among youth remains unacceptably high.

- Nearly 11 million underage youth, ages 12 to 20, reported drinking in the previous 30 days in 2004, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) released in September 2005.<sup>22</sup>
- In 2005, the national Monitoring the Future (MTF) study found that one out of six eighth-graders (17%), one in three tenth-graders (33%), and nearly one out of two twelfth-graders (47%) were current (past 30 days) drinkers.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 1:

Trends Among Eighth-, Tenth- and Twelfth-Graders in Prevalence of Alcohol Use, Past 30 Days, Monitoring the Future, U.S., 1991 – 2005

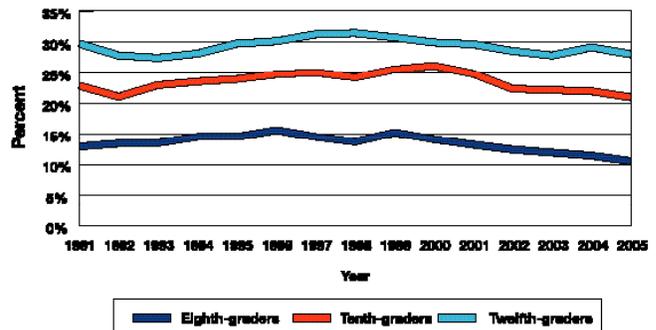


### Binge drinking and drinking to intoxication remain high among youth.

- Six percent of eighth-graders, nearly 18% of tenth-graders and more than 30% of twelfth-graders had been drunk at least once in the past month.<sup>24</sup>
- More than 7 million underage youth, ages 12 to 20, reported binge drinking in the past 30 days in 2004.<sup>25</sup> Binge drinking is defined as having five or more drinks on a single occasion (i.e. within two hours).
- Although available data suggest that the percentage of adolescents who had 5 or more drinks in a row in the previous two weeks declined dramatically from 1983 to 1992, only the eighth-graders are currently substantially below 1992 levels, according to the 2005 MTF study.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 1a:

Trends Among Eighth-, Tenth- and Twelfth-Graders in Prevalence of Drinking 5+ Drinks in a Row in Past Two Weeks, Monitoring the Future, U.S., 1991-2005



Long-term national studies (see Appendix A) differ over whether binge drinking among youth has been on the rise or the decline.<sup>27</sup>

- Data from the national household survey (NSDUH) found that overall rates of binge drinking increased among 12- to 20-year-olds between 1991 and 2003, from 15.2 to 18.9 percent.
- Data from the two national secondary-school-based surveys (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System and MTF), however, show an overall decline in binge drinking rates during this time period.
- By age 14, more than half of children who reported using any alcohol in the past month also reported binge drinking in that same month.<sup>28</sup>
- Ninety-two percent of the alcohol consumed by 12- to 14-year-olds is consumed when binge drinking.<sup>29</sup>

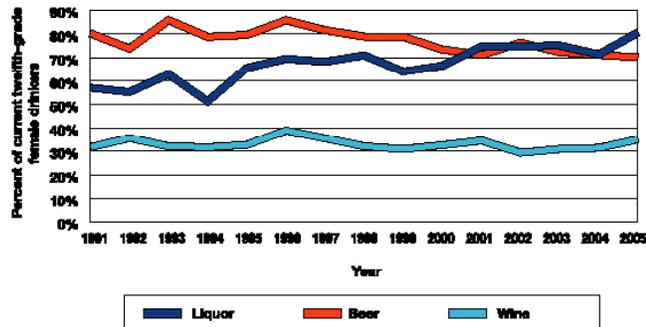
### Girls are getting drunk more.

- In all three national surveys, girls have increased their binge drinking. In the household survey, boys' and girls'

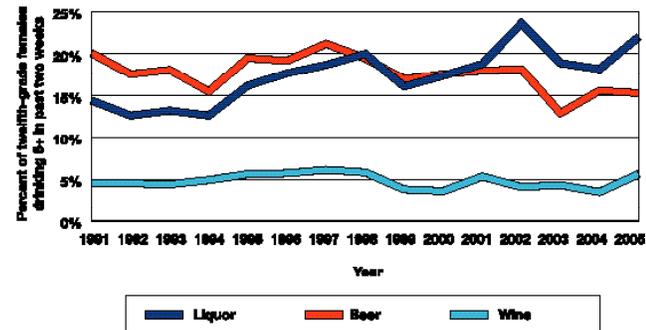
binge drinking is increasing, but the girls' rate is increasing faster than that of the boys.<sup>30</sup>

- At the same time, girls' beverage preferences appear to have changed: the favorite beverage of twelfth-grade female drinkers and binge drinkers has shifted from beer to distilled spirits in the past ten years (the only grade for which data are available).<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 2:**  
Beverage Trends Among Current Twelfth-Grade Female Drinkers, Past 30 Days, Monitoring the Future, U.S., 1991 – 2005

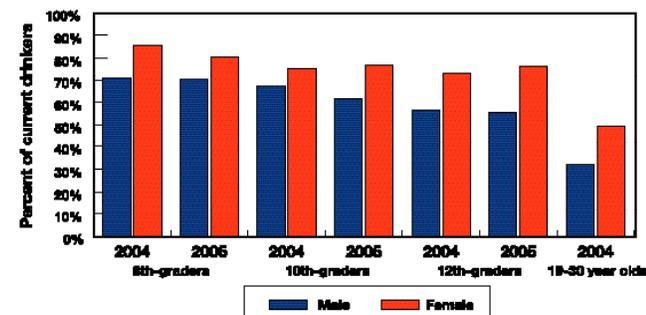


**Figure 2a:**  
Beverage Trends Among Twelfth-Grade Female Binge Drinkers, Past Two Weeks, Monitoring the Future, U.S., 1991 – 2005



- As shown in Figure 2b, “flavored alcoholic beverages,” also known as “alcopops,” are also disproportionately popular with girl drinkers, and with younger drinkers. Monitoring the Future began asking survey respondents about these beverages in 2004.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 2b:**  
Percent of Current Drinkers (Past 30 Days) Who Have Tried Alcopops in the Past 30 Days, Monitoring the Future, U.S., 2004-2005



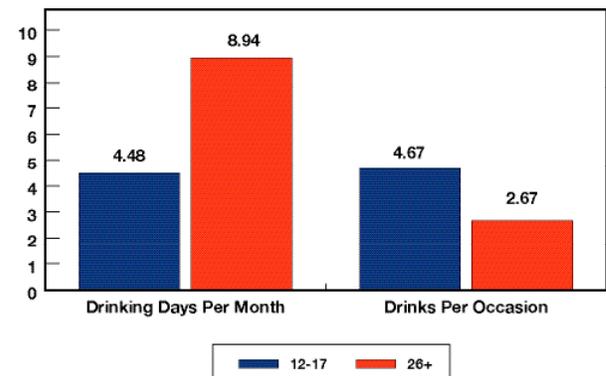
### Youth binge drinking leads to adult binge drinking.

- People who were binge drinkers in adolescence are more likely to be binge drinkers in early adulthood. Analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) found that one-half of males who were binge drinkers at ages 17 to 20 were binge drinkers at ages 30 to 31, compared to less than 20% of those who were not adolescent binge drinkers.<sup>33</sup>
- Youth disapproval and awareness of the risks of binge drinking is declining. Between 1991 and 2003, the percentage of youth who strongly disapproved of others regularly consuming alcohol or binge drinking fell, as did the percentage of youth considering regular or binge drinking a harmful behavior.<sup>34</sup>

### Youth drink more heavily on individual occasions than do adults.

- In comparison with adults 26 years and older, young people drink less frequently but consume more when they drink, according to a 2005 analysis by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). While adults drink alcohol an average of nine days per month, young people ages 12 to 17 do so about five days per month. However, whereas adults average fewer than three drinks per occasion, youth consume about five drinks at a time.<sup>35</sup>

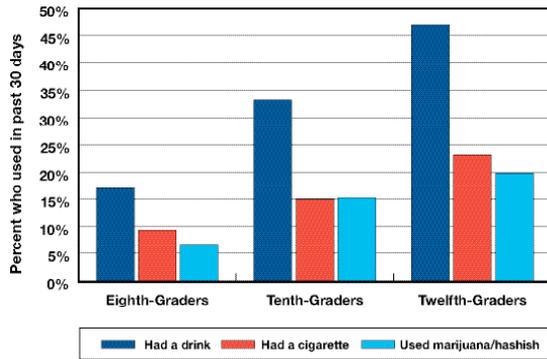
**Figure 3:**  
Teens Drink Less Often Than Adults, But Drink More Per Occasion



### Alcohol is used more by young people than tobacco or marijuana.

- More youth in the United States drink alcohol than smoke tobacco or marijuana, making it the drug most used by American young people.
- In 2005, 17.1% of eighth-graders had consumed alcohol within the previous 30 days, compared with 9.3% who had smoked cigarettes and 6.6% who had used marijuana.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 4:**  
**Young People More Likely to Drink Than Smoke Cigarettes or Marijuana, Monitoring the Future, U.S., 2005**



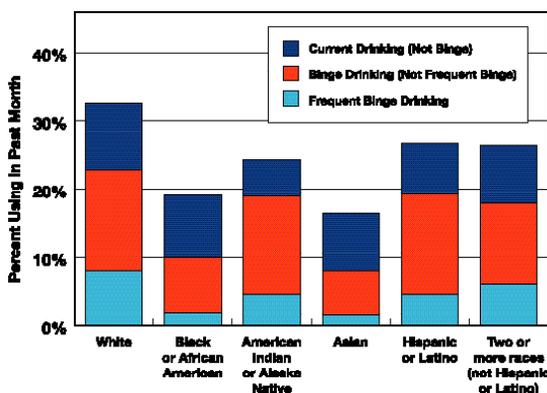
**The overwhelming majority of new drinkers are under 21.**

- In 2004, an estimated 4.4 million people had used alcohol for the first time within the last 12 months, significantly more than in 2003 (3.0 million). Of the 4.4 million new drinkers, 86.9% were under 21.<sup>37</sup>
- The average age of 12- to 20-year-olds in 2004 who started drinking in 2003 was 15.4. The average age of 12- to 17-year-olds in 2004 who started drinking in 2003 was 14.4. These figures have not changed substantially in recent years.<sup>38</sup>
- 5,400 young people under 16 start drinking every day.<sup>39</sup>

**Drinking rates and risk behaviors differ significantly by racial and ethnic group.**

- Among youth ages 12 to 20 in 2004, Blacks and Asians reported the lowest rates of past month alcohol use. Only 16.4% of Asian and 19.1% of Black youth were current drinkers, while rates were between 24.3% and 32.6% for other racial/ethnic groups.<sup>40</sup>

**Figure 5:**  
**Current, Binge and Frequent Binge Drinking Among Persons Age 12 to 20, NSDUH, U.S., 2004**



- Binge drinking was reported by 22.8% of underage Whites ages 12 to 20, 19.0% of underage American Indians or Alaska Natives, and 19.3% of underage Hispanics, compared with only 9.9% of underage Blacks and 8.0% of underage Asian youth.<sup>41</sup>
- While White high school students were the most likely to report having driven after drinking, Hispanic and Black students were most likely to have ridden with a drinking driver in the past 30 days.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 1:**  
**Alcohol-Related Risk Behaviors Among Ninth- Through Twelfth-Graders, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, U.S., 2003**

Demographic Group	% Who Drove After Drinking in the Past 30 Days	% Who Rode with a Drinking Driver in the Past 30 Days
White	12.9	28.5
Black	9.1	30.9
Hispanic	11.7	36.4
Other	12.1	29.0

**II. UNDERAGE DRINKING HAS SEVERE CONSEQUENCES**

*"No one is invincible and things can happen on any given day or time. Tragedies don't necessarily have to happen to the 'other' person. Your life can be altered in a split second without warning."*

- Angie Gratzl, the mother of Jason Gratzl, who, shortly after moving into his dorm room as a college freshman, attended a party, drank heavily, fell from a second-floor balcony, and suffered serious head injuries.<sup>43</sup>

**Underage drinking has profound consequences for young people, their families and their communities.**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 4,571 deaths of youth under age 21 were attributable to excessive alcohol use in 2001.<sup>44</sup>

**Early initiation into alcohol use puts young people at much greater risk of negative consequences later in life.**

- Survey data indicate that those who start to drink before age 13 are nine times more likely to binge drink frequently (five or more drinks per occasion at least six times per month) compared with high school students who begin drinking later, according to an analysis published in 2005 by NIAAA.<sup>45</sup>

- Compared with non-drinkers, frequent binge drinkers (nearly 1 million high school students nationwide) were more likely to engage in other risky behaviors in the previous 30 days including carrying a gun, using marijuana, using cocaine, and having sex with six or more partners.<sup>46</sup>
- Compared with persons who wait until age 21 or older to start drinking, those who start to drink before age 15 are 12 times more likely to be unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol, seven times more likely to be in a motor vehicle crash after drinking, and at least 10 times more likely to be in a physical fight after drinking later in life.<sup>47</sup>
- Those who start to drink before age 15 are also four times more likely to meet the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lifetime.<sup>48</sup>

### Drinking and driving lead to numerous fatalities.

- According to data published by the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), every day approximately three teens die from drinking and driving.<sup>49</sup>
- NHTSA reports that 3,523 young drivers ages 16 to 20 died in motor vehicle crashes in 2004. Of these, 1,048—30%—had been drinking.<sup>50</sup>
- Driving while intoxicated (DWI) increased significantly between 1998 and 2001 among college students and others in the 18 to 24 age group, from 26.5% to 31.4%.<sup>51</sup>

### Drinking results in non-driving-related fatalities as well.

- Every day, at least six teens die of non-driving alcohol-related causes, such as homicide, suicide, and drowning.<sup>52</sup>
- Alcohol has been reported to be involved in 36 percent of homicides, 12 percent of male suicides, and 8 percent of female suicides involving people under 21—a total of about 1,500 homicides and 300 suicides in 2000.<sup>53</sup>

### Drinking is strongly linked to violent crime.

- Young people under the age of 21 commit 45% of rapes, 44% of robberies, and 37% of other assaults.<sup>54</sup> It is estimated that nearly half (47%) of assaults are alcohol-related.<sup>55</sup>
- More than 70,000 college students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape each year.<sup>56</sup>
- An estimated 1,400 college students die each year from alcohol-related injuries and 500,000 students are

injured while under the influence of alcohol each year.<sup>57</sup>

### Drinking increases likelihood of sexual activity.

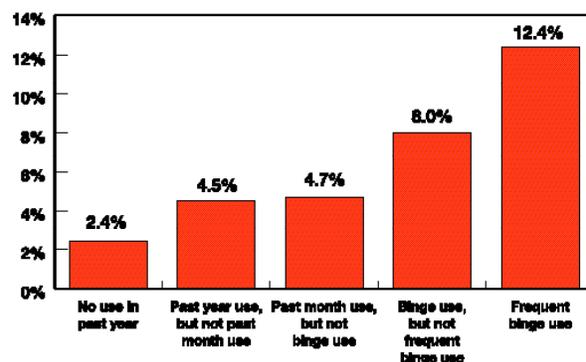
- Teenage girls who binge drink are up to 63% more likely to become teen mothers.<sup>58</sup>
- In 2001, 8% or an estimated 400,000 full-time college students ages 18 to 24 in the United States had unprotected sexual intercourse as a result of drinking.<sup>59</sup>
- Among Black and Hispanic youth, early alcohol initiation is positively associated with number of sexual partners and pregnancy, as well as sexual initiation and recent intercourse. Black and Hispanic females who used alcohol by seventh grade were more likely than those who were non-drinkers to report recent sexual intercourse as tenth-grade students.<sup>60</sup>

### Drinking is tied to delinquent behaviors.

- In 2003, the percentage of youth who engaged in delinquent behaviors (such as stealing, fighting, selling illegal drugs, or carrying a handgun) increased significantly with the level of past year alcohol use.
- Approximately 66% of youth who engaged in any of the delinquent behaviors listed above reported frequent binge drinking, compared with 57% of youth who reported binge alcohol use, 44% who reported past month alcohol use, 44% who reported alcohol use but not in the past month, and 30% who reported no alcohol use.<sup>61</sup>

For example, Figure 6 shows how the percentage of youth who carried handguns increased significantly as the level of youth drinking increased, according to an analysis published in 2005.<sup>62</sup>

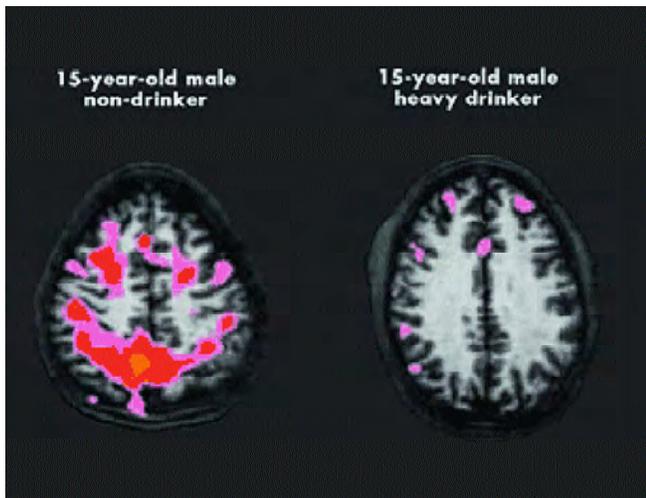
**Figure 6:**  
Percent of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Carried a Handgun in the Past Year, by Level of Alcohol Use, NSDUH, 2003



## Drinking harms the adolescent brain.

Scientists have only recently begun to recognize the serious and significant consequences that underage drinking can have for the brain. Recent studies have found that heavy exposure of the adolescent brain to alcohol may interfere with brain development, causing loss of memory and other skills.<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 7:**  
Images of Teen Brain Activity When Performing Memory Tests<sup>64</sup>



Reprint permission from Susan F. Tapert, Ph.D., University of California, San Diego

- Young, alcohol-dependent 15- and 16-year-olds who drank heavily in early and middle adolescence performed worse on both verbal and non-verbal memory tasks than did their peers with no history of alcohol or other drug problems.<sup>65</sup>
- Animal studies have corroborated this: rats exposed to high levels of alcohol as adolescents had more trouble completing memory tasks as adults than those given alcohol at later ages.<sup>66</sup>
- Magnetic resonance imaging of young human brains—14 adolescents with alcohol use disorders (alcohol dependence or alcohol abuse) and 17 healthy adolescents—revealed that those with alcohol use disorders have smaller hippocampal memory areas than do adolescent non-drinkers.<sup>67</sup>
- Teenage youth with alcohol use disorders have also been found, like adults who are alcohol-dependent, to have smaller-than-average regions of the brain that are involved in complex thinking and emotional control.<sup>68</sup>
- Imaging studies have also shown that teens with alcohol use disorders have greater activity in areas of the

brain previously linked to reward, desire, positive affect and episodic recall in response to alcoholic beverage advertisements and that the degree of brain response was highest in youth who consumed more drinks per month and reported greater desires to drink.<sup>69</sup>

## III. REDUCING AND PREVENTING UNDERAGE DRINKING BY ADDRESSING ACCESS AND APPEAL

A public health approach to reducing and preventing underage drinking rests on two pillars: reducing youth access to alcohol, and reducing the appeal of alcohol to youth.

### ACCESS: DESPITE CONSEQUENCES, ALCOHOL REMAINS EASILY AVAILABLE TO UNDERAGE YOUTH

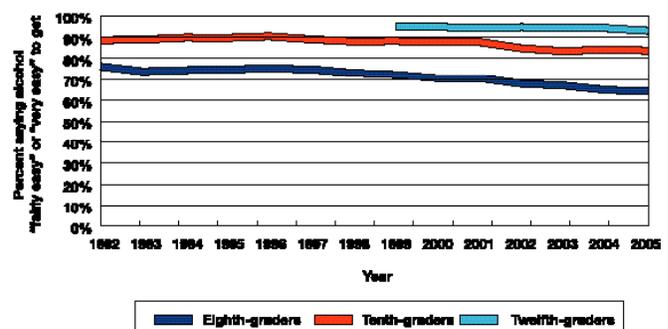
*“Alcohol is everywhere...it is probably harder for teens to get into an R-rated movie than to get alcohol. It’s a joke.”*

– Steven Harris, a 14-year-old from San Bruno, California, August 8, 2005.<sup>70</sup>

The majority of young people report on federal surveys that alcohol is “fairly easy” or “very easy” to obtain.

- For twelfth-graders, perceived availability has remained very high (approximately 95%) since the question was first asked in 1999.
- Among eighth- and tenth-graders, there has been a significant decline in perceived availability, although it still remains high at more than 60% for eighth-graders and more than 80% for tenth-graders, according to the 2005 MTF study.<sup>71</sup>

**Figure 8:**  
Percent Saying Alcohol “Fairly Easy” or “Very Easy” to Get Among Eighth-, Tenth- and Twelfth-Graders, Monitoring the Future, U.S., 1992-2005



In 2005, the American Medical Association commissioned surveys of teens and parents of teens on underage drinking and youth access to alcohol.<sup>72</sup> Both surveys found that teenagers had easy access to alcohol, frequently from non-retail sources.

- Two out of three teenagers said it was easy to get alcohol from their homes without their parents' knowledge, while one out of three teenagers said they were able to get alcohol from their own consenting parents.<sup>73</sup>
- One in 12 parents of teenagers said they allowed the friends of their own teens to drink in their home under their supervision.<sup>74</sup>

Underage youth obtain alcohol from friends, co-workers, parents, siblings and strangers. They get it at home and at community events, as well as at licensed establishments such as bars, convenience stores, liquor stores, grocery stores, and restaurants.

- A survey of Minnesota youth found that 32% of sixth-graders, 56% of ninth-graders, and 60% of twelfth-graders reported obtaining alcohol at parties.<sup>75</sup>
- A study published in 2005 of underage drinking at 43 community festivals found that 50% of 82 attempts to purchase alcohol by pseudo-underage purchasers (buyers over 21 who looked underage) were successful.<sup>76</sup>
- A study of nearly 17,000 students in Oregon found a direct relationship between alcohol use among youth and the rate of illegal sales by merchants. In addition, communities that devoted more resources to minor in possession law enforcement had lower rates of alcohol use and binge drinking.<sup>77</sup>
- Another study of nearly 1,000 alcohol establishments in 20 Midwestern U.S. cities found that police compliance checks led to an immediate 17% reduction in sales to underage youth among those establishments that received a compliance check. However, by three months after the compliance checks, this reduction in illegal sales decreased by 50% among bars and restaurants and disappeared entirely among liquor stores, grocery stores and convenience stores.<sup>78</sup>

Research has found that the more difficult it is for young people to access alcohol, the more it raises the total "cost" of drinking for them and the less likely it is that they will drink.<sup>79</sup>

Policies that address youth access to alcohol from social sources include:

- beer keg registration,
- restricting alcohol use on public property and at community events, and
- social host responsibility.

Policies that address reducing youth commercial access to alcohol include:

- periodic compliance checks,
- administrative penalties for sales to minors,
- requiring those who serve alcohol to undergo thorough training,
- regulating or banning home delivery of alcohol,
- setting minimum age of seller requirements,
- commercial host liability,
- requiring the posting of alcohol warning posters,
- restrictions on alcohol licensing near schools and other locations where young people congregate, and
- restricting minors' access to on-premises drinking establishments.

### **Raising the legal age for purchasing alcohol to 21 in the U.S. has saved lives.**

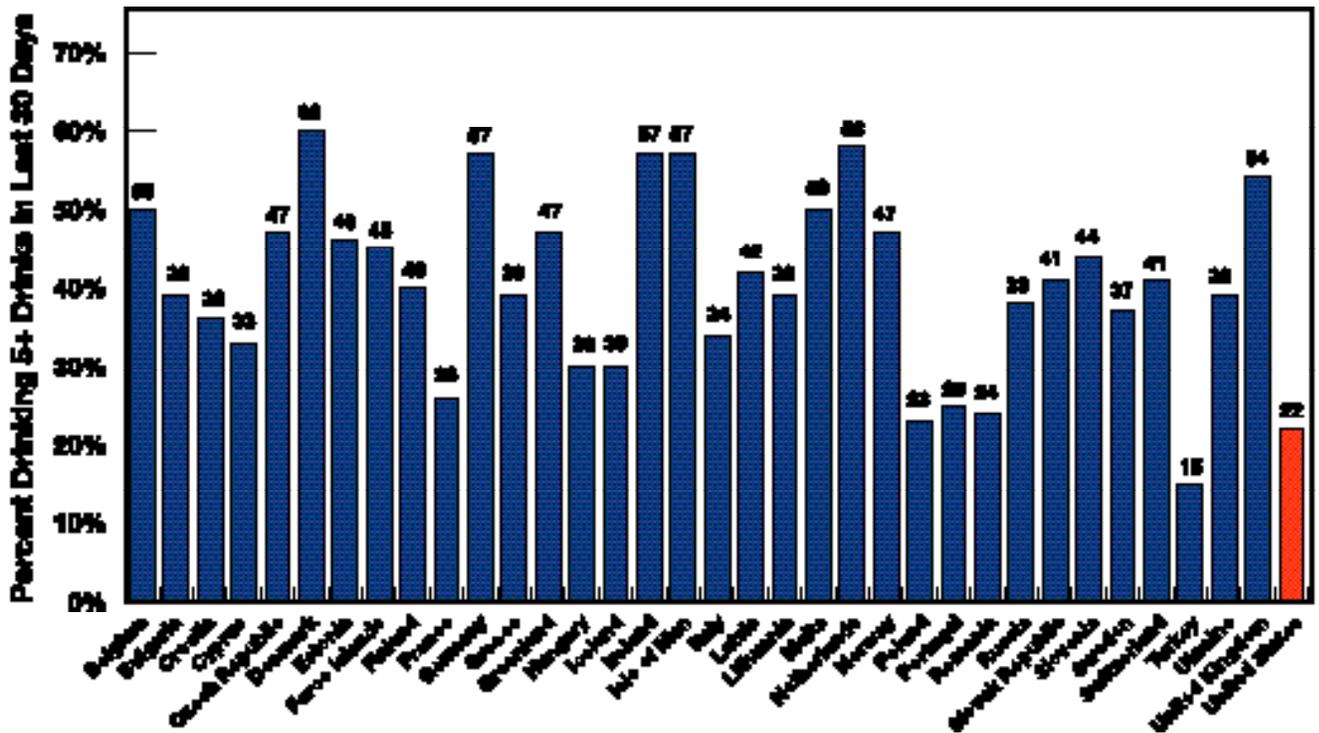
All 50 states and the District of Columbia have laws making it illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under age 21. Numerous studies have demonstrated that raising the minimum drinking age in the United States from 18 to 21 significantly decreased self-reported drinking, fatal traffic crashes, and DUI arrests among young people.<sup>80</sup>

### **European countries with lower legal purchase ages have higher levels of youth alcohol use and intoxication than the US.**

It is often asserted that in European countries drinking is not a problem among young people because they are socialized at an early age to drink responsibly. If this were true, one would expect that European youth would be less likely to binge drink or drink to intoxication.

In fact, the statistics show otherwise. A comparison of data from 34 European countries with figures from the United States shows that youth in more than three-quarters of the European countries were more likely to drink to intoxication than their U.S. peers.<sup>81</sup> Among 15- to 16-year-olds, the percentages of youth who had five or more drinks in a row in the last 30 days were as follows:<sup>82</sup>

Figure 9:  
Prevalence of Current Binge Drinking by 15- to 16-Year-Olds by Country,  
European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), 2003

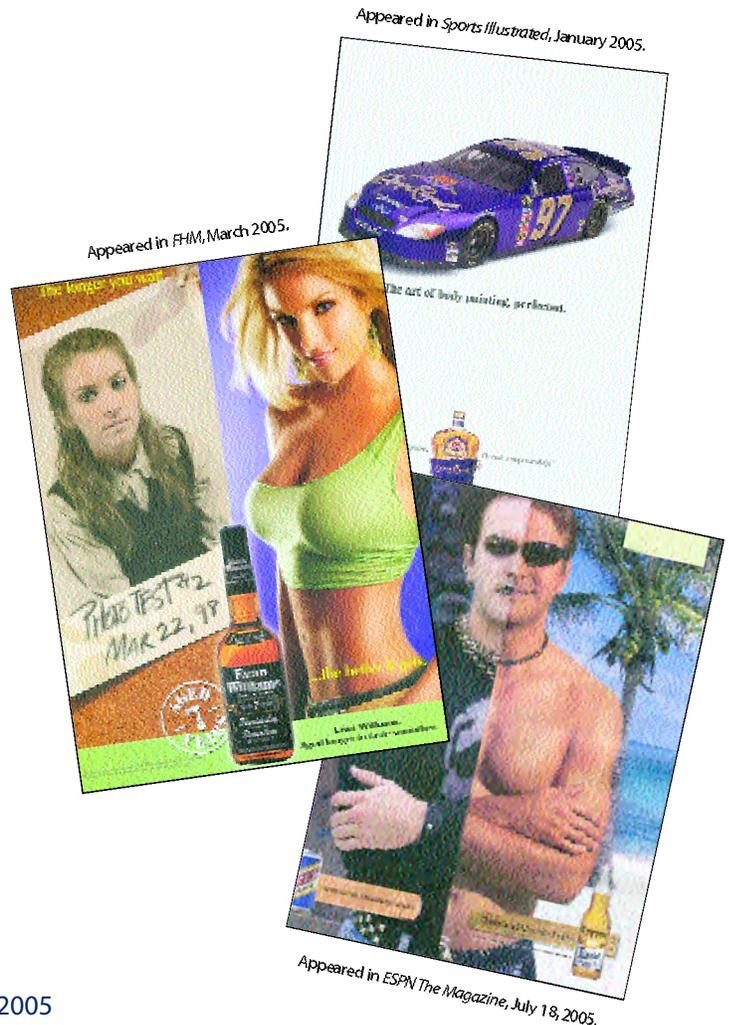


## APPEAL: ALCOHOL ADVERTISING AND MARKETING REACH AND AFFECT YOUTH

*“Unfortunately, unlike other epidemics the medical community has faced, there is no single pill or shot or slogan that can stop the alcohol epidemic. The alcohol industry would have us believe differently, however. They tell us, and especially they tell parents, ‘Talk to your kids about alcohol.’ They imply that just by talking, we can compensate for an environment that encourages our kids to drink, one that allows aggressive advertising and marketing campaigns designed to make alcohol consumption seem glamorous, sexy and fun. These ads are everywhere our kids are because the fact of the matter is clear: Like any industry with a product to sell, the alcohol industry needs to keep expanding the market for its wares. Children and teens represent their most promising emerging markets.”*

– J. Edward Hill, MD, President, American Medical Association, July 25, 2005.<sup>83</sup>

Alcohol companies spent nearly two billion dollars to advertise alcohol in the measured media of television, radio, print, and outdoor in 2004.<sup>84</sup> According to the Federal Trade Commission, these companies spend another two to three times this amount each year on unmeasured marketing activities, such as product development, sponsorship of sports and entertainment events, point of purchase promotions, product placements, and college marketing.<sup>85</sup>

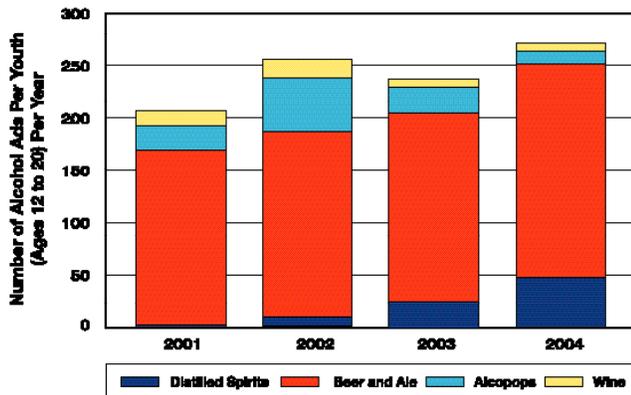


## Youth exposure to alcohol advertising is substantial.

- On television from 2001 to 2004, the average number of alcohol ads seen by young people ages 12 to 20 grew from 209 to 276, an increase of 32%.<sup>86</sup> The more television kids saw, the more ads they were exposed to. For instance, 90% of kids saw an average of 306 ads in 2004.

Figure 10:

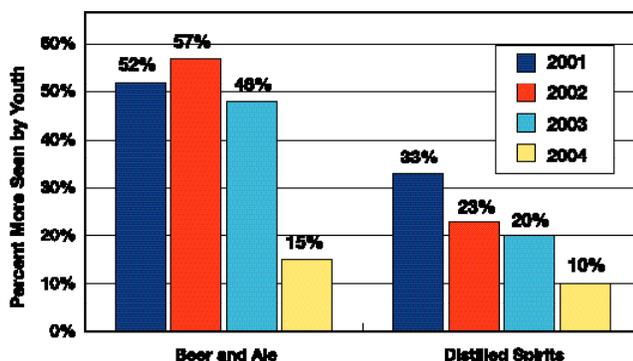
Television Alcohol Ads Viewed by Youth Ages 12 to 20, 2001 to 2004



- In 2004, young people aged 12 to 20 were exposed per capita to 15% more beer ads, 10% more distilled spirit ads, and 33% more alcopop and alcoholic lemonade ads in magazines than adults 21 and older. These levels of overexposure are significantly lower than 2001 levels.<sup>87</sup>
- In that same year, the 15 television shows in 2004 with the largest audiences of teens aged 12 to 17 all had alcohol ads.<sup>88</sup>
- An analysis of a sample of more than 67,000 airings of radio ads for the top 25 alcohol brands in 104 media markets found that underage youth aged 12 to 20 heard more alcohol advertising per capita than adults age 21 and over in 55 markets, and more alcohol advertising than young adults aged 21 to 34 in 5 markets.<sup>89</sup>

Figure 11:

Underage Youth Saw More Alcohol Ads Per Capita Than Adults in Magazines, Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, U.S., 2001 to 2004



## Youth awareness of alcohol advertising is high.

- A study published in 2005 of 3,521 fourth- and ninth-graders in South Dakota found that television beer ads resulted in high levels of beer advertising awareness in children as young as age 9 and even higher awareness among 14-year-olds.<sup>90</sup>
- Seventy-five percent of fourth-graders and 87% of ninth-graders remembered seeing the Budweiser ferret ad; two-thirds of fourth-graders and more than 9 in 10 ninth-graders knew the ferret advertised beer.<sup>91</sup>

## Studies show alcohol advertising affects youth drinking.

- The first national longitudinal study of youth drinking and alcohol advertising exposure in the United States, published early in 2006, found that for underage drinkers, exposure to an additional alcohol ad was correlated with a 1% increase in drinking.<sup>92</sup>
- In that same study, for every additional dollar per capita spent on alcohol advertising in a local market, underage drinkers consumed 3% more alcohol.<sup>93</sup>
- A study of 2,250 middle-school students in Los Angeles found that a one standard deviation increase in exposure to television programs containing alcohol commercials in seventh grade was related to a 1.4-fold increase in the likelihood of beer consumption, a 1.3-fold increase in wine/spirits consumption, and a 1.3-fold increase in consuming at least three drinks in a row one year later.<sup>94</sup>
- Another study, of middle-school students in South Dakota, found that exposure in seventh grade to beer advertising via magazines, concession stands at sporting and music events, and in-store displays, but not television, predicted frequency of drinking in ninth grade.<sup>95</sup>
- Numerous long-term studies in other countries have found as well that youth who see, hear, and read more alcohol ads are more likely to drink and drink more heavily than their peers.<sup>96</sup>
- A study of 253 10- to 17-year-olds in California found that specific elements of beer ads (such as humor or use of animal characters) significantly contributed to how much the young people liked the ads, which in turn increased these young people's intentions to purchase the product and beer brand promoted by these advertisements. In contrast, ads that focused on product-related characteristics or sent a message about the minimum drinking age reduced young people's desire to purchase the product associated with them.<sup>97</sup>

### **Youth may also be influenced by exposure to drinking in movies.**

- Researchers from Dartmouth Medical School found depictions of alcohol use in 92% of 601 contemporary movies, including in 52% of “G”-rated films.
- They also found, based on a survey of more than 5,000 students ages 10 to 14 in Vermont and New Hampshire schools, that children with higher exposure to movie alcohol use at the initial assessment were more likely to have started drinking when followed up 13 to 26 months later.<sup>98</sup>

### **New alcohol products have high youth appeal.**

New products being developed by the alcohol industry appear to have high youth appeal. Alcopops – sweet, fruity drinks like Smirnoff Ice and Bacardi Silver - were introduced in this country a decade ago. They have proven most popular among the youngest drinkers.

- According to 2005 Monitoring the Future data, 75% of current eighth-grade drinkers had an alcopop in the past month, compared to 70% of tenth-grade drinkers, and 65% of twelfth-grade drinkers.<sup>99</sup>
- Equivalent data for use by young adults is available only for 2004, when 78% of current eighth-grade drinkers, 71% of tenth-grade drinkers, 65% of twelfth-grade drinkers, and only 42% of drinkers aged 19 to 30 had had an alcopop in the past month.<sup>100</sup>
- Two nationwide polls released by the American Medical Association in December 2004 found that approximately one-third of teenage girls had tried alcopops, and one out of six had done so in the past six months. Further, more teen girls had drunk alcopops in the past six months than teen boys (31% versus 19%).<sup>101</sup>

### **Stronger industry standards would reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing.**

- In 2003, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine recommended that alcohol companies move towards a 15% maximum youth audience composition for their advertising, reflecting the proportion of 12- to 20-year-olds in the general population 12 and above.<sup>102</sup>
- An analysis published in 2005 estimated that such a shift from the current voluntary 30% maximum would reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television by 20%, without impairing the industry's ability to reach young adults over 21.<sup>103</sup>

- The FTC in 1999<sup>104</sup> and the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine in 2003<sup>105</sup> recommended that alcohol companies restrict their product placements to movies rated “R” or “NC-17.”

## **IV. EFFORTS TO CURB YOUTH DRINKING REMAIN LIMITED IN SCOPE AND EFFECTIVENESS**

*“Over the years we have made great progress in reducing tobacco and illicit drug use among our nation’s young people... Underage alcohol use has been a tougher and more persistent problem. However, I think the solutions are well within our grasp.”*

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt, during the conference “Preventing Underage Alcohol Use: A National Meeting of the States,” October 31, 2005.<sup>106</sup>

### **Federal funding and leadership for alcohol prevention and youth is minimal.**

The federal government’s “Comprehensive Plan for Preventing and Reducing Underage Drinking,” released in February 2006,<sup>107</sup> sets three worthwhile goals but lacks a specific, defined action plan for achieving them.

- The plan sets three numeric targets, which are weaker than previous targets set by the federal government for the reduction of underage alcohol use.<sup>108</sup>
- Although the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine put forward a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to curb underage drinking in their report *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, released in 2003,<sup>109</sup> the plan ignores many of these recommendations.
- The action steps laid out to achieve the plan’s goals contain no measures to evaluate how successfully they are being implemented.
- Although specific program dollars are not provided, the plan estimates that federal agencies spent \$152 million on programs to address underage drinking in 2004, and expected to spend \$159 million in 2005.
- Underage drinking cost the nation \$53 billion in 1996,<sup>110</sup> and \$62 billion in 2001, the most recent year for which estimates are available.<sup>111</sup>

### **Congress is concerned about the lack of momentum.**

The Senate Appropriations Committee placed report language in appropriations legislation signed into law by the President on December 30, 2005 expressing strong con-

cern over the lack of progress being made on underage drinking by the federal government:

*We are concerned that [the interagency committee set up by HHS at the request of Congress to coordinate federal underage drinking activities] has not made more progress; it has not produced meaningful coordination among Federal agencies, identified effective and underperforming programs, or created a plan for improving Federal data collection. In addition, the [committee] has not identified the resources currently available for programs targeting underage drinking or made recommendations on the allocation of additional resources. Finally, the interim plan lacks measurable goals or benchmarks which would serve to monitor the progress and accountability of the [committee's] efforts.*<sup>112</sup>

### **States take the lead in the wake of federal inaction.**

At the state level, at least four states have developed and begun to implement plans to reduce underage drinking in their respective states based on the recommendations in the 2003 report from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine.<sup>113</sup> The efforts of Wyoming, Florida, New Hampshire, and Oregon are summarized here as examples of what some states are doing.

- Wyoming's plan<sup>114</sup> includes a media campaign, a review of alcohol advertising restrictions and state access laws, and youth and community-oriented interventions.
- Florida has set goals of reducing prevalence of alcohol use among sixth- to twelfth-graders to 20% or less and illegal sales of alcohol to minors to 8% or less through a combination of counter-advertising, education, and strengthened law enforcement.<sup>115</sup>
- New Hampshire has passed new keg registration and party host liability laws, and developed recommendations to reduce underage drinking through public information, education, opportunities for limiting

access, coordination, and research and evaluation.<sup>116</sup>

- Recommendations presented to Oregon's governor include a statewide media campaign, formation of a strong statewide coalition on underage drinking, creation of an independent third party review system for complaints about alcohol advertising, and enhanced enforcement of liquor laws.<sup>117</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

As this report demonstrates, underage drinking remains a serious problem with devastating consequences in the United States.

Every day 5,400 young people under 16 start drinking, and 4,500 young people under 21 died as a result of alcohol use in the most recent year for which data are available. Too many kids are drinking too much and causing far too many tragedies for themselves and for others.

Our knowledge has increased substantially about the risks of underage drinking, in terms of injury and dependence later in life, and in terms of damage to the developing brain. Our knowledge is growing as well about the influence of alcohol advertising on young people's decisions to drink. We also know a great deal about what works, in reducing youth access to alcohol and the appeal of alcohol to youth.

Recent efforts have been insufficient to drive down the high prevalence rates of underage drinking substantially. However, significant declines like those witnessed two decades ago are possible. Strong efforts pursued nationwide to curb easy access to alcohol and reduce youth exposure to alcohol advertising hold great promise.

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt has said, "*the solutions are well within our grasp.*" Success depends on our willingness as a nation to take hold of what we know, and put it to work on behalf of our children.

### Data Collected by HHS on Underage Drinking

The federal government funds three major, annual national surveys in the United States that include data on underage drinking: the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), Monitoring the Future (MTF), and the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). However, these surveys—each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages—do not use common indicators that would allow for direct comparison of youth alcohol consumption patterns.

#### National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is an annual, general population, household survey conducted throughout the year to provide reliable estimates of the prevalence of substance use, consequences of that use, and patterns of substance use in the United States. It includes questions about the frequency of the consumption of alcoholic beverages, such as beer, wine, whiskey, brandy, and mixed drinks.

The advantage of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health is that it includes youth who are not in the school population. The disadvantage is that it fails to include youth who are institutionalized or homeless. Further, since the interview is conducted in the home—often with a parent present—it may inhibit truthful responses from youth.

#### Monitoring the Future (MTF)

The Monitoring the Future (MTF) Study is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. MTF has been tracking tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use and

attitudes toward drugs among students in the eighth and tenth grades since 1991 and among students in the twelfth grade since 1975. In addition, college students and young adults are surveyed. The goal is to present the same set of questions over a period of years to see how answers change over time. In addition, annual follow-up questionnaires are mailed to a sample of each graduating class for a number of years after their initial participation. MTF is a nationally representative, school-based survey conducted every spring.

The advantages of the Monitoring the Future survey are that interviews are conducted with youth away from their parents and that it is comparable to the European survey data of school children. The disadvantage of this survey is that it only includes school children.

#### Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System monitors six categories of priority health risk behaviors among youth and young adults, including tobacco and alcohol use and behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence. YRBSS includes a national school-based survey of high school students conducted biennially by CDC as well as state and local school-based surveys conducted by education and health agencies. YRBSS has been conducted since 1991. The latest national survey for which results have been reported was conducted among students in grades nine through 12 in 2003.

The advantage of this survey is that a wide range of behaviors are tracked along with alcohol use. However, its disadvantages are that only schoolchildren are included, it is not nationally uniform, and it is only conducted once every two years.

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Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth  
Georgetown University  
Box 571444  
3300 Whitehaven Street, NW, Suite 5000  
Washington, DC 20057-1485  
(202) 687-1019  
[www.camy.org](http://www.camy.org)