



Alcohol Use Among Youth in California, 2017-2021

Alcohol is the most widely used substance among youth in the United States.¹ More young people use alcohol than tobacco or illicit drugs.² Early adolescence is a time where youth may begin to experiment with alcohol. However, it is important to remember that alcohol is a powerful drug that can alter moods and youth may lack the judgement and coping skills to use alcohol wisely.²

Although excessive alcohol use includes any drinking by those under 21 years of age, binge drinking is common among youth who drink.³ The risk of experiencing negative alcohol-related impacts is greater among individuals who binge drink compared to those who do not binge drink.¹ For more information about the health effects of underage drinking, please visit the [CDPH website](#).

Youth Drinking Patterns

During 2019-2021, 2.8% of California middle school students and 10.0% of high school students reported consuming at least one alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days.⁴

In the past 30-days, 0.90% of middle school students and 5.0% of high school students reported binge drinking (Figure 1).⁴

In 2019, 1.5% of high school students reported that the largest number of alcoholic drinks they had in a row in the past 30 days was 10 or more alcoholic drinks.⁵

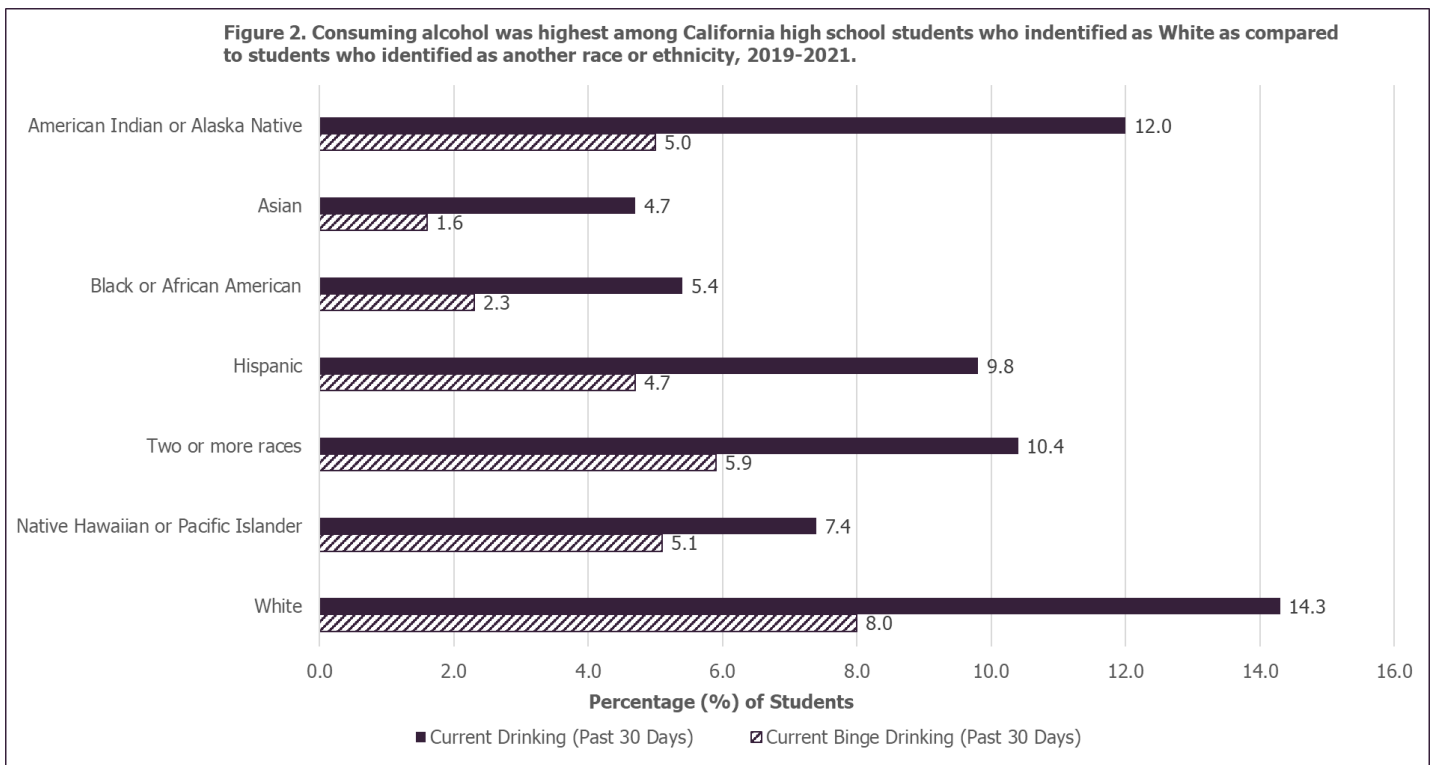
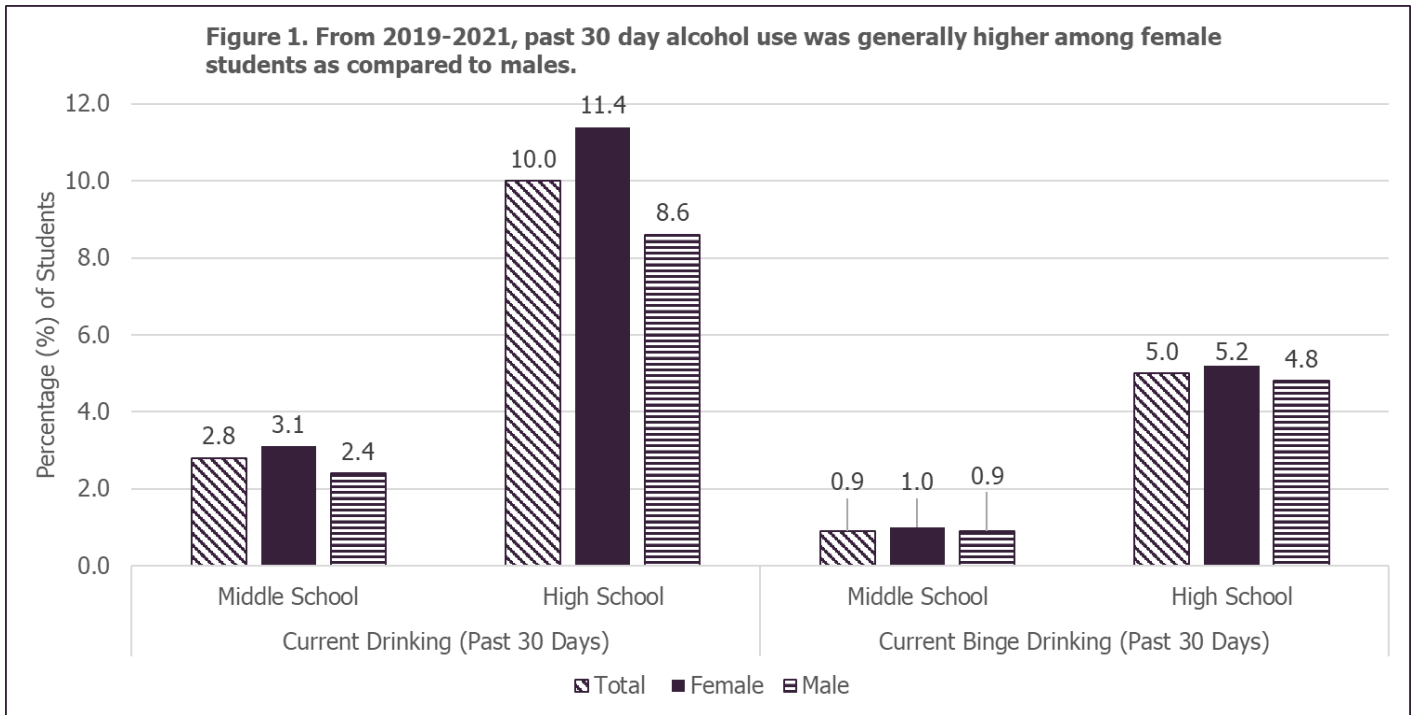
Drinking patterns among youth differed by grade, sex, race, and ethnicity in 2019-2021. Drinking in the past 30 days was generally higher among female students as compared to males (Figure 1), which is aligned with national trends.¹

Overall, high school students who identified as White reported the highest past 30-day alcohol use and binge drinking as compared to students who identified as another race or ethnicity (Figure 2).⁴

Binge drinking is defined as consuming 4 or more drinks on one occasion for females and 5 or more drinks consumed on one occasion for males (one occasion= 2-3 hours).³

Fast Fact:

Among teens who drink, 24 percent of middle school students and 47 percent of high school students engaged in binge drinking.⁴



Youth Perceptions of Drinking

In 2017-2019, 42.0% of middle school students and 52.9% of high school students felt that people having five or more alcoholic drinks, once or twice a week can result in great risk of physical and other harms.⁴

In 2017-2019, 27.7% of middle school students and 32.3% of high school students felt that people having alcoholic drinks “occasionally” can result in great risk of physical and other harms.⁴

Harms Associated with Alcohol Use in Youth

Some harms associated with alcohol use can be fully attributable to alcohol use (e.g., alcoholic liver disease, alcohol dependence syndrome) and others are partially attributable to alcohol use (e.g., hypertension, breast cancer). However, partially attributable harms are only currently calculated for deaths associated with excessive alcohol use, whereas emergency department visits and hospitalizations only reflect those conditions that are fully attributable to alcohol use. Therefore, the emergency department visits and hospitalization rates do not reflect the full burden of alcohol-related harms.

Deaths from Alcohol

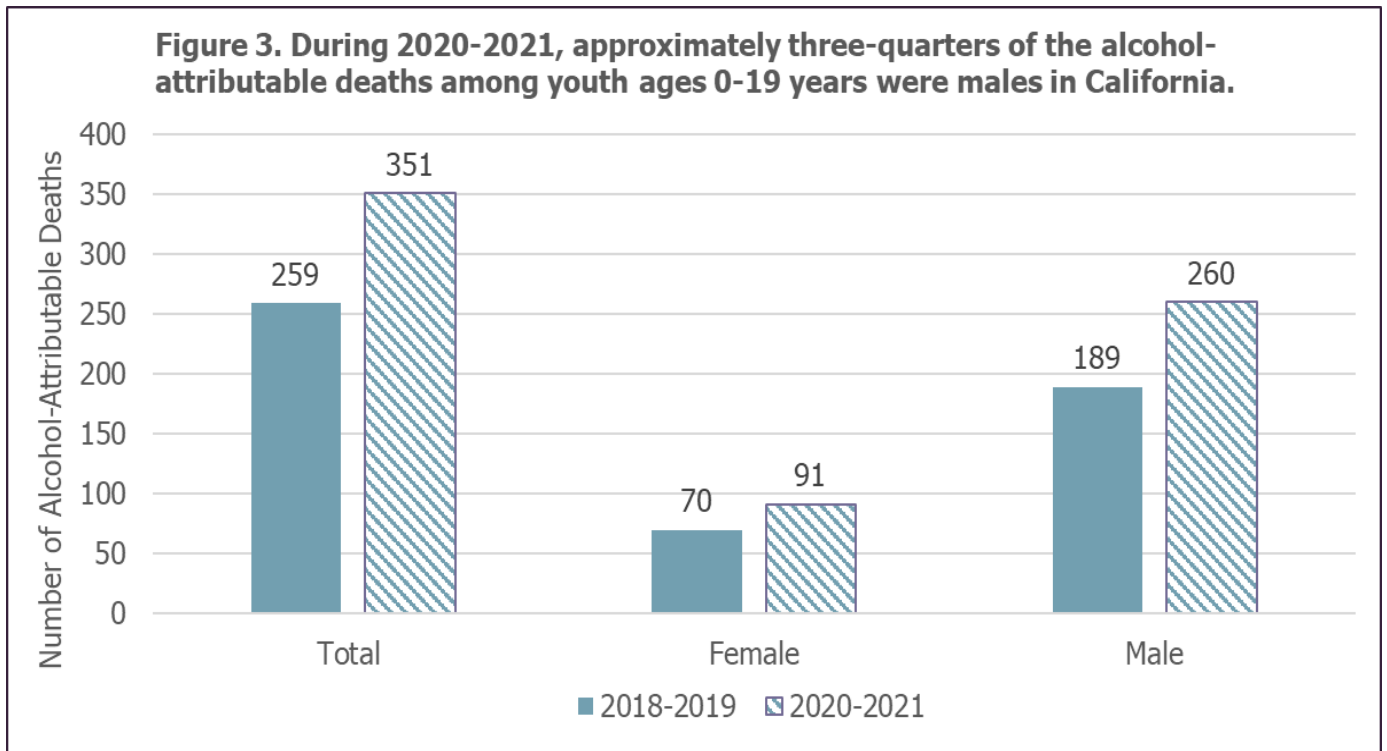
Excessive alcohol use is a leading preventable cause of death in the United States, and it can result in or contribute to both acute (i.e., short-term) and chronic causes of death.⁶ Acute deaths represent 99% of all alcohol-attributable deaths among California youth ages 19 and under. Acute deaths, such as alcohol-related poisonings, motor vehicle crashes, and suicide, usually result from the short-term effects of binge drinking or drinking to the point of intoxication.

During 2020-2021, on average, 351 deaths per year in California were due to excessive alcohol use among those 19 years of age and younger, which represents a 36% increase in deaths from 2018-2019 in this age group (Figure 3).^{7,8}

During 2020-2021, approximately three-quarters of the alcohol attributable deaths among youth ages 0-19 years were among males (Figure 3).^{7,8}

Fast Fact

In California, there was a total of 19,734 years of potential life lost in 2020-2021 due to alcohol-attributable deaths among youth ages 0-19, shortening the lives of those who died by an average of more than 55 years.^{7,8}



Alcohol-related Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations among California Youth

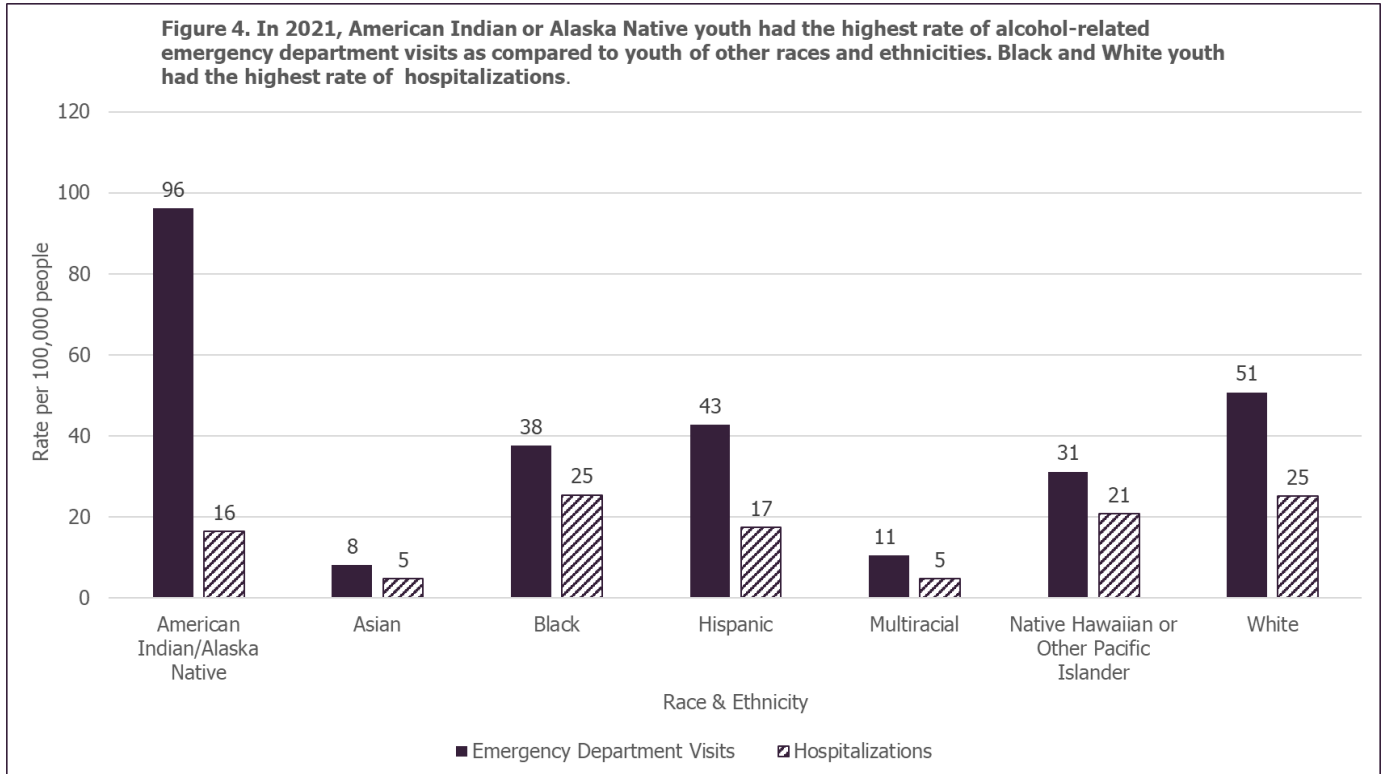
In 2021, a total of 3,838 youth aged 17 years and younger were seen at an emergency department and 1,827 youth in the same age range were hospitalized due to alcohol-related causes.⁹ This includes emergency department and hospital visits that had a diagnosis mentioning alcohol. It does not include visits that might have been caused by alcohol use but did not mention alcohol in the diagnosis (such as injuries).

Female and male youth ages 0-10 years had low rates of alcohol-related emergency department visits (females: 2 per 100,000; males: 3 per 100,000) and hospitalizations (females: 3 per 100,000; males: 4 per 100,000).⁹

Female youth aged 11-17 years had higher rates of alcohol-related emergency department visits (115 per 100,000 and hospitalizations (58 per 100,000) as compared to male youth in the same age range (emergency department visits: 88 per 100,000; hospitalizations: 33 per 100,000).⁹

American Indian or Alaska Native youth (ages 0-17) had the highest rate of alcohol-related emergency department visits as compared to youth of other races and ethnicities. (Figure 4).⁹

The highest rates of alcohol-related hospitalizations were among youth who identified as Black and among youth who identified as White (Figure 4).⁹



Trends Over Time

Alcohol-related emergency department visit rates among youth in the 11–17-year-old age group have declined 40 percent from 169 visits per 100,000 in 2017 to 101 visits per 100,000 in 2021.⁹ Alcohol-related hospitalization rates among youth in the 11–17-year-old age group have declined 31 percent from 65 hospitalizations per 100,000 in 2017 to 45 hospitalizations per 100,000 in 2021. Since 2017, female youth aged 11-17 years have consistently had higher rates of hospitalizations as compared to male youth of the same age.⁹

Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcohol use disorder (AUD) is a spectrum disorder that is characterized by an impaired ability to stop or control alcohol use despite adverse consequences. Severe AUD was previously referred to as alcoholism. AUD can have lasting changes on the brain. No matter how severe the problem may be, most people with AUD can benefit from treatment.¹⁰

- In 2021, 3.3% of youth ages 12-17 met the criteria for an alcohol use disorder.¹¹
- Among those youth with alcohol use disorder, 3.0% reported needing but not receiving treatment at a specialty facility for alcohol use in the past year.¹¹

Public Health Recommendations to Prevent Underage Drinking

State and community-level efforts can help influence underage drinking and reduce excessive alcohol use. Some strategies include:

- Help people learn about the latest research on underage alcohol use. An informed public is key to reducing underage drinking.
- Talk to young people about the dangers of underage alcohol use through non-judgmental conversations.
- Support programs that help young people already experimenting with drinking.

Effective Policies for All Californians

The availability, visibility and affordability of alcohol affects how much people drink and the health-related harms of excessive alcohol use. To ensure every community is safe and healthy, we can:

- Reduce affordability of alcohol. Increasing taxes on alcohol could provide much-needed revenue for community health initiatives. By making alcohol more expensive, youth and adults may purchase and drink less.
- Limit the number of places that sell alcohol and set them farther apart from each other. When there are many places that sell alcohol within a given area, excessive alcohol consumption, crime, and other problems can increase there.
- Support enforcing laws that prohibit the sale of alcohol to those 21 years and under. Limiting the availability to purchase alcohol within a community can reduce underage drinking and risks to youth.

To learn more about effective policies to reduce excessive alcohol use and its associated harms, check out the CDC's [Alcohol Prevention Factsheet](#).

Getting Help

- If you or someone you know needs help with their alcohol use, call SAMHSA's confidential, free, 24/7 National Hotline at 1-800-662-4357.
- Call or text 988 if you are experiencing suicidal, substance use, or other mental health crises. A trained crisis counselor is available to help you 24/7 for free. You can also visit [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).
- For more getting help resources, visit the [CDPH website](#).

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Underage Drinking. Available at: [Underage Drinking | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) \(cdc.gov\)](#). Accessed April 21, 2023.
2. National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol's Effects on Health. Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol – Parents. Available at: [Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol - Parents | National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\) \(nih.gov\)](#). Accessed April 21, 2023.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Excessive Alcohol Use. Available at: [Excessive Alcohol Use | CDC](#). Accessed April 21, 2023.
4. California Healthy Kids Survey, 2019-2021
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2021. Available at: [YRBSS Results | DASH | CDC](#). Accessed March 25, 2024.
6. Jiménez JA, Demeter NE, Pinsker EA. [Deaths from Excessive Alcohol Use \(ca.gov\)](#), 2020-2021. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Public Health, January 2023. Date accessed: April 13, 2023.
7. California Comprehensive Master Death File 2018-2020. California Comprehensive Death File (Static) Preliminary 2021.
8. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data 2018-2021. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
9. California Department of Health Care Access and Information, Emergency Department Visit and Hospitalization Data, 2017-2021
10. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Health Topics: Alcohol Use Disorder. Available at: [Health Topics: Alcohol Use Disorder | NIAAA](#) Accessed May 25, 2023.
11. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2021 (Preliminary). Available at: [2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Model-Based Prevalence Estimates \(50 States and the District of Columbia\) | SAMHSA \(samhsa.gov\)](#). Accessed April 21, 2023.

Funding Source

This factsheet was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$166,667 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.