

AlcoholNZ article

Title

Who, what and how young people are drinking alcohol and who isn't drinking – What the data shows

At a glance

- This article was published in print form in HPA's June 2016 *AlcoholNZ* magazine (available on alcohol.org.nz/alcoholnz).
- It provides data from three national surveys about young people's alcohol use, including who isn't drinking. The focus is on young people under 18 years.
- An increasing proportion of under 18-year-olds are choosing not to drink alcohol and, of those who do drink alcohol, fewer are drinking in a potentially harmful way.
- A significant proportion are, however, still drinking in a potentially harmful or risky manner, especially in the 15 to 17 year age group.
- The proportion of secondary school students who reported drinking alcohol increases with age, with a much larger proportion of older students drinking alcohol than younger students.
- Parents and friends are the main suppliers of alcohol to secondary school students.

Citation

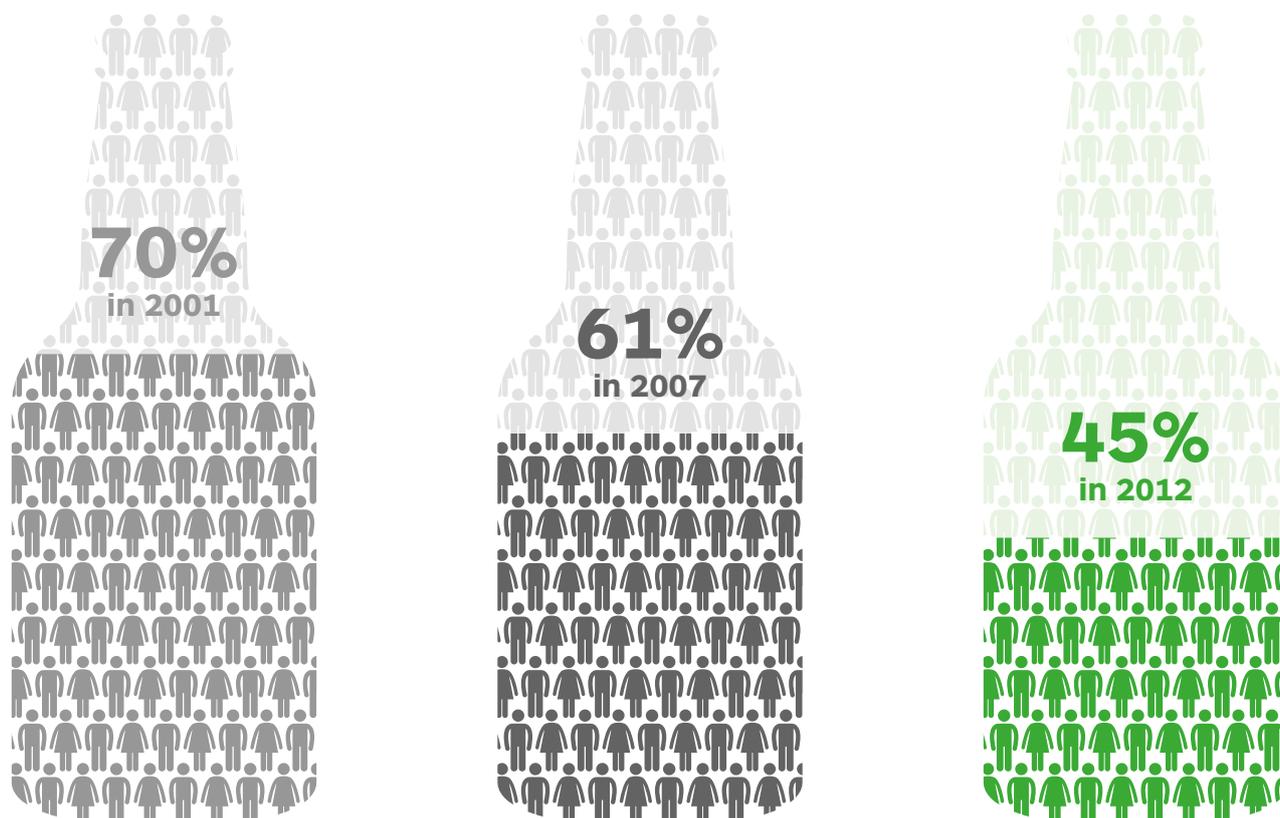
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Who, what and how young people are drinking alcohol and who isn't drinking

What the data shows

This article provides an overview of data about young people's alcohol use, including who isn't drinking alcohol. It uses data from the Ministry of Health's New Zealand Health Survey (NZHS), the Health Promotion Agency's Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) and Youth Insights Survey (YIS), and the University of Auckland Adolescent Research Group's Youth2000 Survey Series (Youth2000 Surveys) of secondary school students (Years 9 to 15). The age range covered varies for each survey. The focus in this article is on young people under 18 years.

The proportion of New Zealand secondary school students reporting they currently drink alcohol has dropped*



*Adolescent Health Research Group, 2013; Ameratunga et al., 2011; Clark et al., 2013.

Who is drinking or not drinking alcohol?

The good news is that New Zealand national surveys indicate that an increasing proportion of under 18-year-olds are choosing not to drink alcohol, and of those who do drink alcohol fewer are drinking in a potentially harmful way. Internationally, countries with drinking cultures comparable with New Zealand's, such as Australia, USA and the United Kingdom, are observing similar improvements in youth drinking over time (Pennay, Livingston & MacLean, 2015). It is not clear why this is occurring but a promising generational shift in youth drinking appears to be taking place.

The Ministry of Health's NZHS found that the proportion of 15 to 17-year-olds who reported consuming alcohol within the past 12 months has declined from 75% in 2006/07 to 57% in 2014/15. It also found that the proportion of past year drinkers aged 15 to 17 years who consumed 6+ drinks of alcohol at least once a month has declined from 34% in 2006/07 to 19% in 2014/15 (Ministry of Health, 2015).

The Youth2000 Surveys found that the proportion of secondary school students who reported that they currently drink alcohol has declined from 70% in 2001 to 61% in 2007 to 45% in 2012. Those who reported binge drinking (five or more alcoholic drinks within four hours) within the last four weeks has also declined, from 40% in 2001 to 34% in 2007 to 23% in 2012 (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2013; Ameratunga et al., 2011; Clark et al., 2013).

Even though the proportion of under 18-year-olds who are drinking has fallen, a significant proportion of them are still drinking alcohol in a potentially harmful or risky manner, especially in the 15 to 17 age groups. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the total and the pattern of the changes in alcohol use with age, including for different levels of alcohol use. The proportion of secondary school students who reported drinking alcohol increases with age, with a much larger proportion of older students drinking alcohol than younger students (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2013).

What alcoholic drinks are being drunk?

The 2012 Youth2000 Survey found that the types of alcoholic drinks that secondary school students usually consumed were RTDs (ready-to-drink mixes) (53%), beer (28%), spirits (9%), wine (5%) and other (4%). Females were more likely to consume RTDs (71%) than males (32%), and males (51.9%) were more likely to consume beer than females (9%) (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2013).

How are they getting alcohol?

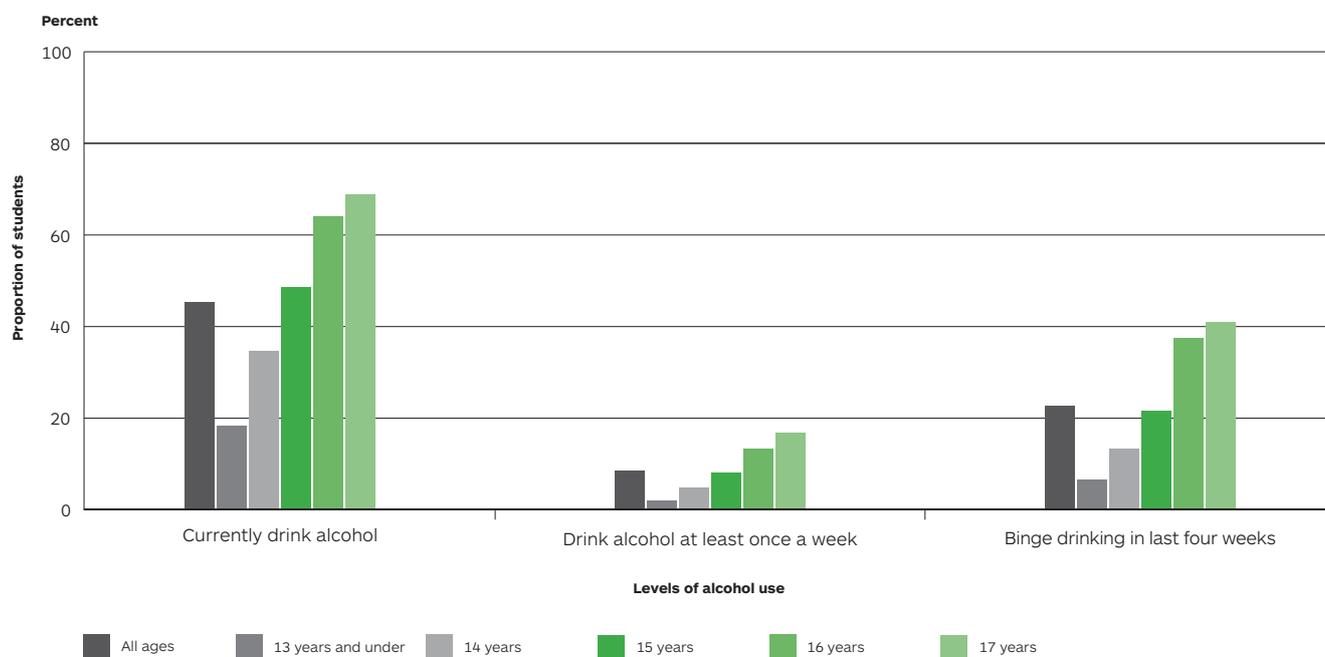
Parents and friends are the main suppliers of alcohol. The 2012 Youth2000 Survey of secondary school students found that the most common reported sources of alcohol were parents (60%), friends (44%) and someone else who bought the alcohol for them (30%). Eleven percent of students reported buying the alcohol themselves. Multiple responses were allowed. The students who were buying alcohol themselves varied by age and included 3% to 5% of students aged 15 or under, 9% of students aged 16 years and 24% of students aged 17 or older (Clark et al., 2013; Adolescent Health Research Group, 2013).

Usual sources of supply varied depending on the secondary school students' level of substance use (any one of alcohol, marijuana or other substance use). Students with very high levels of substance use tended to have higher rates for most sources of alcohol supply compared with students with lower levels of substance use (Fleming et al., 2014). Figure 2 shows these differences in reported sources of usual supply.

What are the alcohol-related risks and harms?

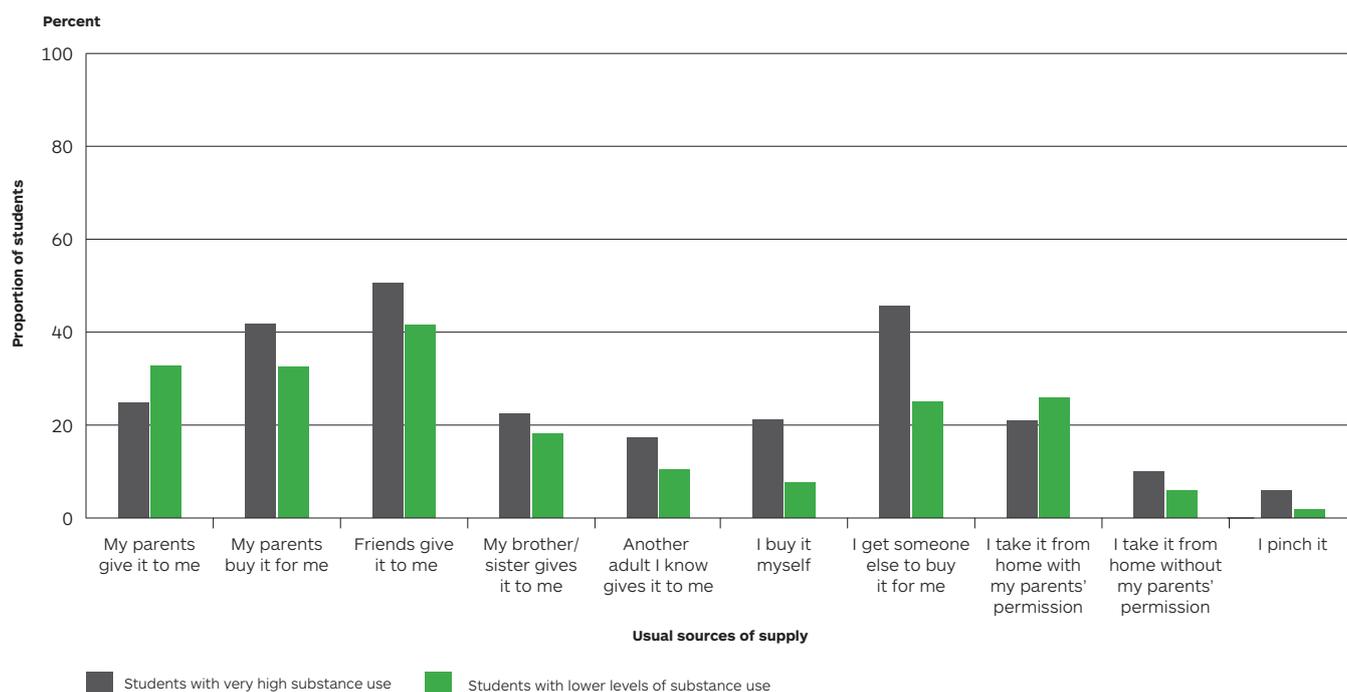
Some under 18-year-olds reported risky drinking and experiencing harms as a result of their alcohol use. HPA's 2014/15 ABAS found that, of the 15 to 17-year-olds who consumed alcohol on at least one occasion over the previous four weeks, 22% reported having had too much to drink on an occasion and 33% reported that they got drunk or intoxicated on an occasion (Nelson, Gray & Holland, 2016).

Figure 1: Secondary school students' levels of alcohol use, by age



Source: Graph created from data in Adolescent Health Research Group (2013).

Figure 2: Usual sources of supply of alcohol to secondary school students, by substance use level



Source: Graph created from data in Fleming et al. (2014).

The 2012 Youth2000 Survey found that the secondary students who were current drinkers reported a range of problems after drinking alcohol. The most common were getting injured (15%), doing things that could have got them into trouble (eg, stealing) (13%) and having unsafe sex (12%). In this same group, 11% reported that friends or family had told them to cut down on their drinking, 8% reported that they were themselves worried about how much they drink, and 13% reported that they had tried to cut down or give up their drinking at least once (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2013).

HPA's YIS found that, among 14 to 15-year-olds, those who drank alcohol at risky levels more frequently were more likely to also smoke tobacco and/or use marijuana. This group was more likely to be female, of Māori ethnicity, attend a low decile school, report having a high past week income, have low social connectedness and have parents who did not monitor their expenditure or whereabouts or enforce rules (White, Walton & Walker, 2015).

Who are the under 18-year-old non-drinkers?

As outlined earlier in this article, more under 18-year-olds are choosing not to drink alcohol. HPA's 2014/15 ABAS collected information about non-drinkers. The survey found that, of the 15 to 17-year-olds who reported that they did not consume alcohol within the last year, 90% identified themselves as having always been a non-drinker, when asked how long they had not been drinking alcohol. They were also asked if there were any reasons for their choice not to drink alcohol (multiple responses were possible). The top five reasons reported were: no specific reason (26%); not interested or that it was not part of their life (18%); did not drink for health-related reasons (11%); did not like the taste or the way it made them feel (10%); and it was related to adult or parent pressure (10%) (Gray, Newcombe & Gordon, 2015).

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