

# Alcohol and Young People Aged 18 to 34 Years

## Key Points:

Approximately 68% of 18 to 34-year-old people drink alcohol regularly.

On the day of their heaviest alcohol consumption in the previous week, 71% of male drinkers aged 18 to 34 and 67% of female drinkers aged 18 to 34 drank at hazardous or harmful levels. Young people are aware of some of the long-term health effects associated with excessive alcohol consumption, however, these effects are not considered important, or seen as a concern.

Alcohol use was estimated to have caused the deaths of 827 people aged 20 to 39, from 1984 to 1994.

Data contained in this document are from a number of sources. Where data are not available for those aged 18 to 34, figures have been presented for the 18 to 24 age group.

## CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Based on Western Australian 1994 survey data, approximately 68% of 18 to 34-year-old people drink alcohol regularly, 17% drink only occasionally and 16% do not drink alcohol at all. <sup>1</sup>

In order to allow comparison between amounts of alcohol consumed, the number of standard drinks in a given container of alcohol must first be calculated. A standard drink of alcohol contains approximately 10 grams of pure alcohol. Examples of standard drinks are: a small glass of wine (100 mL); a glass of fortified wine (60 mL); a middy of full-strength beer (275 mL); and a shot of spirits (30 mL). <sup>2</sup>

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines state that low-risk alcohol consumption is no more than four standard drinks per day for males and no more than two standard drinks per day for females. <sup>2</sup>

Hazardous consumption is more than four and, at most, six standard drinks per day for males and more than two and, at most, four standard drinks per day for females. <sup>2</sup>

Harmful consumption is more than six standard drinks per day for men and more than four standard drinks per day for women. <sup>2</sup>

Calculating risk levels on the basis of average daily alcohol consumption (over a seven day period) indicates that 76% of 18 to 34-year-old drinkers drink at low-risk levels, 12% are hazardous drinkers and 12% drink at harmful levels in Western Australia.<sup>1</sup>

On the day of heaviest alcohol consumption in the previous week (categorised according to the NHMRC guidelines) 71% of male drinkers and 67% of female drinkers aged 18 to 34 drank at hazardous or harmful levels in Western Australia. This averages ten standard drinks for male drinkers aged 18 to 34 and almost six standard drinks for female drinkers of the same age. <sup>1</sup>

Of concern is the fact that almost seven out of ten (67%) 18 to 24-year-old drinkers who exceeded the NHMRC recommendations on the day of their heaviest consumption in the previous week, planned to do so.<sup>3</sup>

This is supported by Australian data indicating that 68% of 20 to 34-year-olds (who have consumed alcohol in the last 12 months) got drunk deliberately on the days when they exceeded the NHMRC recommendations.<sup>4</sup>

Weekly alcohol consumption by young people is commonly characterised by drinking binges on a few days a week. In fact, 39% of male drinkers aged 18 to 34 and 36% of female drinkers aged 18 to 34, drink safely on at least four days of the week but drink harmfully on one to three days. Saturdays are the most popular drinking days, followed by Fridays and Sundays.<sup>5</sup>

## **HOW CONSUMPTION HAS CHANGED OVER TIME**

The average self-reported daily amount of alcohol consumed by 18 to 34-year-old drinkers increased slightly between 1991 and 1994 (males 1991: 36 mL, 1994: 42 mL; females 1991: 15 mL, 1994: 19 mL).<sup>1</sup>

Over the same period, an increased number of males (1991: 18%, 1994: 22%) and females (1991: 2%, 1994: 11%) aged 18 to 34 reported consuming alcohol at hazardous or harmful levels.<sup>1</sup>

## **TYPES OF ALCOHOL CONSUMED**

Western Australian male drinkers aged 18 to 34 on average consume almost four times as much beer (30 mL of pure alcohol) each day as they do spirits (8 mL of pure alcohol).<sup>1</sup>

On average, female drinkers aged 18 to 34 consume similar amounts of wine (7 mL of pure alcohol), beer (5 mL of pure alcohol) and spirits (5 mL of pure alcohol) each day.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1991 to 1994 period, self-reported average daily consumption of spirits by 18 to 34-year-old male and female drinkers increased slightly.<sup>1</sup>

## **WHERE ALCOHOL IS CONSUMED**

Young people aged 18 to 24 are most likely to drink with close friends in a private home. Other most common locations where alcohol is consumed by this group include (in order) pubs, nightclubs and discos.<sup>3</sup>

## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS ALCOHOL**

Many young people have undesirable attitudes to alcohol consumption. Almost nine in ten (87%) 18 to 24-year-olds believe most people their age get drunk regularly and approximately one in three (36%) believe that 'if you're not driving you don't have to worry about how much you drink'.<sup>3</sup>

While many females aged 18 to 24 indicate that they have the ability to have as good a night when they are sober as they do when drunk, most males of the same age think it is very unlikely that they will enjoy a night as much if they do not drink.<sup>3</sup>

Attitudes to drinking among those aged 18 to 24 vary. The novelty and enthusiasm for going out late and drinking a lot appears to decrease for some drinkers after age 21. These young people indicated that the appeal of 'clubbing' faded after four to five years, and those who worked

reported that they felt more tired, had to get up earlier, they became 'fed-up' with feeling ill. <sup>3</sup> Young drinkers aged 18 to 34 are aware of some of the long-term health effects that result from excessive alcohol consumption. However, these effects are not considered important, or seen as likely to happen to them. Only in a few cases does it prompt consideration of current behaviour.<sup>1</sup> Some young people aged 18 to 24 believe binge drinking to be preferable to drinking the recommended number of standard drinks every day, as it gives the body a chance to 'clear out' in between sessions. Others feel that the sudden onslaught of a week's alcohol 'allowance' in one session overloads the system and causes more harm. <sup>3</sup>

## **LIMITING FACTORS**

Factors limiting alcohol consumption among 18 to 24-year-old drinkers include:

Having to drive;

Drinking with people other than friends;

Drinking at venues other than at home;

Having to work the next day. <sup>3</sup>

Family responsibilities also limit alcohol consumption among those aged 25 to 34 years. <sup>1</sup>

## **NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF DRINKING**

Wasting the next day, becoming violent, making a fool of yourself and to a much lesser extent, the cost of alcohol, are considered to be negative aspects of getting drunk. <sup>3</sup>

Overall, females aged 18 to 24 find excessive alcohol consumption unacceptable if it results in: falling over; 'blurting out secrets'; guys fighting; and girls acting 'sleazy'. <sup>3</sup>

Males aged 18 to 24 find excessive alcohol consumption unacceptable if it results in: not being able to get a taxi because a mate is too drunk; guys fighting; and arguing, especially with mates.<sup>3</sup>

## **MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY RATES**

The 20 to 24 age group has the highest rate of hospital admissions due to alcohol-caused assaults (164 per 100,000), followed by the 25 to 29 age group (138 per 100,000), the 15 to 19 age group (110 per 100,000), and the 30 to 34 age group (102 per 100,000). In each of these age groups, males are more likely than females to be hospitalised for an alcohol-caused assault. <sup>6</sup>

The 20 to 24 age group also has the highest rate of hospital admissions due to alcohol-caused road injuries (148 per 100,000), followed by the 15 to 19 age group (139 per 100,000), the 25 to 29 age group (76 per 100,000), and the 30 to 34 age group (55 per 100,000). Again, males in these age groups are more likely than females to be hospitalised for alcohol-caused road injuries. <sup>6</sup>

During the period 1984 to 1994 alcohol-use was estimated to have caused the deaths of 827 people aged 20 to 39 (516 aged 20 to 29 and 311 aged 30 to 39). <sup>7</sup>

## **REFERENCES**

Health Promotion Services. Alcohol Consumption Among those aged 18 to 34 years Bulletin No. 6, Health Promotion Services, Health Department of Western Australia, 1997.

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## RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- ▼ Guidelines for implementing an alcohol-free gig at a licensed venue
- ▼ Alcohol and young people (12–17 years)
- ▼ Economic costs of alcohol to the community
- ▼ Alcohol and pregnancy
- ▼ Health and social consequences of alcohol consumption
- ▼ Effects of alcohol on the body
- ▼ Regrettable behaviours
- ▼ Alcohol – separating the facts from the myths
- ▼ What is a standard drink?
- ▼ Facts about alcohol
- ▼ History of alcohol
- ▼ Alcohol