

## Most teen binge drinkers still bingeing in their twenties

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The majority of adolescents who binge drink continue to drink heavily in their 20s, a landmark Australian study has found.

The study of 2,000 teenagers who were followed for 15 years from 1992 found high levels of past-week binge drinking among teens. Half of male participants aged 14 to 17 had consumed five or more alcoholic drinks on a single occasion in the past week. A third of the female teenagers also reported binge drinking in the previous week. More than 90% of male teen binge drinkers continued to drink at these levels or more in their 20s, as did 70% of the females.

While binge drinking in adolescence was predictive of binge drinking in young adulthood, the converse was not true. Not binge drinking in adolescence was not protective against binge drinking in young adulthood. Indeed more young Australians are likely to commence binge drinking in their 20s than in adolescence – 70% of males and 48% of females who had not reported binge drinking as adolescents did so as young adults.

Heavy binge drinking (defined as more than 20 drinks in a single session for males and 11 for females) was common. Just under half of males and more than a third of females reported heavy binge drinking in either adolescence or young adulthood – of these more than 40% first reported heavy binge drinking in adolescence.

The findings, [published online in the British Medical Journal Open](#), are based on secondary analyses of a landmark study of nearly 2000 Victorian secondary school students - the '2000 stories' cohort - led by Professor George Patton of the Centre for Adolescent Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne. The students were followed up and interviewed over 15 years, starting in 1992. They were interviewed at six six-monthly intervals during their teens and then again when they were aged 20-21, 24-25, and 29 years.

Lead author of the analysis was Professor Louisa Degenhardt from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales.

"The persistence of binge drinking into young adulthood suggests the need for a range of policies to reduce its uptake at a young age, such as limiting alcohol's availability, increasing costs and discouraging 'drinking to get drunk'," Degenhardt said.

Co-author Professor George Patton emphasised such policies must target a broader audience than just teenagers.

“Many have had a view that heavy drinking in the teens is a phase that young people will ‘mature out of’ when they get older. This study is very clear that it is not a ‘passing phase’ but the beginning of substantial alcohol problems for many young people,” Patton said.

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