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Contact: Diane Swanbrow, Swanbrow@umich.edu, (734) 647-9069

Extreme binge drinking: How common is it among high school seniors?

ANN ARBOR --- A University of Michigan study published online in *JAMA Pediatrics* finds that ten percent of high school seniors have engaged in extreme binge drinking, drinking ten or more alcoholic drinks in a single sitting.

The study is based on data from a nationally representative sample of more than 16,000 high school seniors, surveyed between 2005 and 2011 as part of the annual Monitoring the Future Study conducted by the U-M Institute for Social Research (ISR).

“More than one in ten high school seniors (10.5 percent) had 10 or more drinks in a row and more than one in 20 (5.6 percent) had 15 or more drinks in a row at least once in the last two weeks,” said developmental psychologist Megan Patrick, lead author of the study.

The study is important because it provides insight into seemingly conflicting trends: that reported levels of binge drinking – traditionally defined as having five or more drinks in a row – have been declining among adolescents but that at the same time, medical emergencies involving teen alcohol use have been rising.

“During the last two weeks,” the survey questions asked, “how many times (if any) have you had five [10, 15] or more drinks in a row?” A drink was defined as any of the following: a 12-ounce can or bottle of beer; a 4-ounce glass of wine; a 12-ounce bottle or can of wine cooler; or a mixed drink, shot glass of liquor, or the equivalent.

Patrick and colleagues found considerable variation in the rates of binge drinking among different groups. Young men, students from more rural areas, and individuals of white race/ethnicity had particularly high rates of extreme binge drinking. Teens from the Midwest were more likely than those in other geographic regions to report extreme binge drinking.

For example, 15.1 percent of males reported drinking 10 or more drinks in a single setting within a two-week period, compared to 5.3 percent of females.

“Adolescent alcohol consumption is an important public health issue,” said Patrick. “We hope that this study is helpful in drawing attention to the prevalence of extreme binge drinking among our nation’s high school seniors.”

Co-authors of the study were John Schulenberg, Meghan Martz, Patrick O’Malley and Lloyd Johnston at the U-M and Jennifer Maggs at Pennsylvania State University.

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Established in 1949, the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (ISR) is the world's largest academic social science survey and research organization, and a world leader in developing and applying social science methodology, and educating researchers and students from around the world. For more information, visit the ISR Web site at <http://home.isr.umich.edu>