

# Heavy drinking and binge drinking rise sharply in US counties

April 23 2015

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Today, Americans are more likely to be heavy drinkers and binge drinkers than in recent years due in large part to rising rates of drinking among women, according to a new analysis of county-level drinking patterns in the United States.

By contrast, the percentage of people who drink any alcohol has remained relatively unchanged over time, according to the latest research by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington.

Published in the *American Journal of Public Health* on April 23, the study "Drinking patterns in US counties from 2002 to 2012" is the first to track trends in alcohol use at the county level. Its findings focus on Americans aged 21 and older. The study was presented at the Association of Health Care Journalists conference.

Heavy drinking among Americans has increased sharply, up 17.2% since 2005. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines [heavy drinking](#) as exceeding an average of one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men over the past month.

In 2012, 8.2% of all Americans were considered heavy drinkers and 18.3% were binge drinkers. Madison County, Idaho, had the lowest levels of binge drinking in 2012 (5.9%), while Menominee, Wisconsin, had the highest rates of binge drinking (36% among residents). For heavy drinking, Hancock County, Tennessee, had the fewest heavy

drinkers (2.4% of its population) and Esmeralda County, Nevada, recorded the largest proportion of heavy drinkers (22.4%).

Nationally, 18.3% of people were binge drinkers in 2012, which the CDC defines as consuming four drinks or more for women and five drinks or more for men on a single occasion at least once during the past month. Since 2005, binge drinking has increased 8.9% across the US.

Nationwide, women showed a much faster escalation in binge drinking than men, with rates rising 17.5% between 2005 and 2012; men, on the other hand, saw rates of binge drinking increase 4.9%.

"We are seeing some very alarming trends in alcohol overconsumption, especially among women," said Dr. Ali Mokdad, a lead author of the study and professor at IHME. "We also can't ignore the fact that in many US counties a quarter of the people, or more, are binge drinkers."

These rising rates of heavy and binge drinking starkly contrast with America's trends for drinking any alcohol, which have remained largely unchanged over time (56% of people in the US consumed any alcohol in 2005 and 2012).

Some regional drinking patterns emerged at the national level, with several areas in the West, Midwest, and New England showing higher levels of alcohol consumption, particularly in comparison with a number of counties in the southern United States and Utah. But beyond regional comparisons, the most striking disparities in alcohol use were found within state lines.

In Texas, for example, rates of overall [binge drinking](#) ranged from 10.8% in Collingsworth County, well below the national average of 18.3%, to 35.5% in Loving County, nearly twice the national average in 2012. These county-level findings, which can be explored with IHME's

US Health Map data visualization tool, highlight the need for more locally-focused alcohol policies and programs.

"In the US, state-level results often mask the full range of what people are experiencing health-wise," said IHME's Director Dr. Christopher Murray. "When you can map out what's happening county by county, over time, and for men and women separately, that's also when you can really pinpoint specific health needs and challenges - and then tailor health policies and programs accordingly."

Binge drinking is commonly associated with a higher risk for serious bodily harm, such as injuries, [alcohol](#) poisoning and acute organ damage. Heavy drinking is considered a risk factor for longer-term conditions, such as liver cirrhosis and cardiovascular disease.

**More information:** Download the study at:  
[www.healthdata.org/research-ar ... s-counties-2002-2012](http://www.healthdata.org/research-ar...s-counties-2002-2012).

Download data for counties in each state and the District of Columbia at:  
[www.healthdata.org/us-health/data-for-download](http://www.healthdata.org/us-health/data-for-download).

Explore US trends in alcohol use and other health indicators using the US Health Map data visualization tool: [vizhub.healthdata.org/us-health-map/](http://vizhub.healthdata.org/us-health-map/).

Provided by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

Citation: Heavy drinking and binge drinking rise sharply in US counties (2015, April 23)  
retrieved 1 February 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-heavy-binge-sharply-counties.html>

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