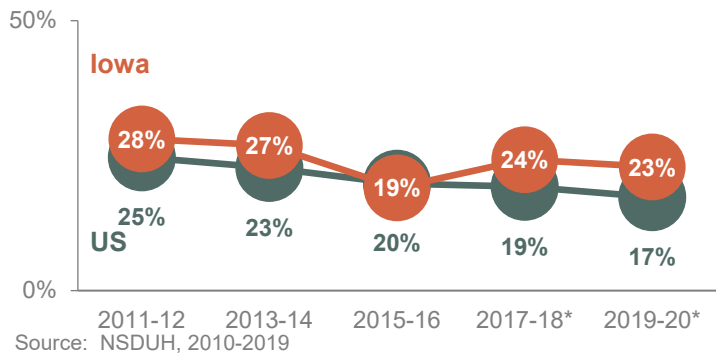


## Alcohol: Underage Drinking

### Under 21 and Under the Influence

Alcohol use among Iowans under the age of 21 is a serious public health concern. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health ([Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\), 2019-20](#)) estimated that almost one-quarter (23%) of Iowans 12 to 20 years old reported alcohol use in the past 30 days compared to 17% of those of the same age nationwide. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance among youth in the United States and Iowa, more than tobacco and illicit drugs ([Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\), 2022](#); [Iowa Youth Survey \(IYS\), 2021](#)). Nationwide, an estimated 3,900 deaths each year are attributed to excessive drinking among people under the age of 21 ([CDC, 2022](#)). Factors such as community and peer norms concerning the use of and access to alcohol and contribute to this public health problem.

Underage drinking is significantly higher in Iowa compared to the US national average.  
*In 2019-20, nearly one in four (23%) Iowans 12 to 20 years old reported alcohol use in the past 30 days compared to one in six (17%) US, 12 to 20 year olds.*



### Consequences and Costs of Underage Drinking

The consequences of underage drinking are associated with financial, social, interpersonal and legal difficulties. Youth who drink alcohol are more likely to experience problems at school (miss more days of school or have poor or failing grades), in their personal life (physical violence such as fighting), and are at risk for alcohol-related injury or death from motor vehicle crashes, burns, falls, or drowning ([CDC, 2022](#)). Binge drinking increases the risk of youth experiencing these problems ([Esser et al., 2019](#)) which is significantly higher among Iowans 12 to 20 years old (15%) compared to 10% of 12 to 20 year olds nationwide ([SAMHSA, 2019-20](#)).

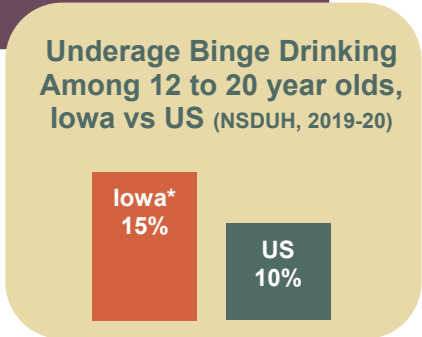
According to the U.S. Surgeon General, people who use alcohol before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop an alcohol use disorder later in life compared to those who have their first drink at age 20 or older ([U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016](#)). Already, an estimated 2.2% of Iowa youth, 12 to 17, meet the criteria for alcohol use disorder similar to the 1.6% of US, 12 to 17 year olds ([SAMHSA, 2018-19](#)).

The rate of suspensions and expulsions in Iowa schools related to alcohol has averaged 67 removals per 100,000 students annually over the past 10 years. ([Iowa Department of Education, 2021](#)).

The cost of underage drinking in 2010 was \$24.3 billion nationally and \$255 million in Iowa and is associated with losses in school or work productivity, health care, and criminal justice ([Sacks et al., 2015](#)).

In Iowa, nearly one-quarter (23%) of fatal crashes involving a young driver (aged 15-20) involved alcohol-impaired driving compared to 17% of fatal crashes nationally ([National Center for Statistics and Analysis, 2022](#); [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2022](#)).

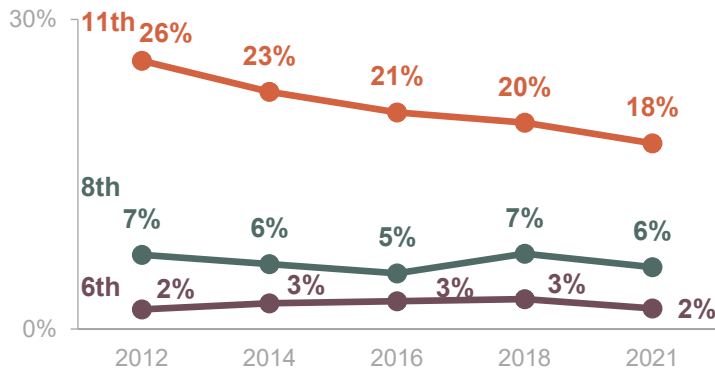
**Definition of Binge Drinking:**  
5 or more drinks for males  
4 or more drinks for females  
Consumed in 2 hours or less



## Iowa Youth Continue to Use Alcohol

Among Iowa youth, alcohol use in the past 30 days has decreased from 26% in 2012 to 18% in 2021 among 11<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Past 30 day alcohol use among 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students has remained relatively unchanged since 2012.



Source: IYS, 2012-2021

7% reported having ever driven a vehicle after drinking alcohol. Nearly half (48%) of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in Iowa who reported past 30 day alcohol use obtained it at a party.

Research shows that as perception of risk decreases, alcohol use increases. About two-thirds (67%) of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, 74% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, 72% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students reported binge drinking poses *moderate risk* or *high risk* to physical or mental health (IYS, 2021).

In addition, underage alcohol use is associated with greater perceived accessibility and when youth believe that others in their peer group have a favorable view of alcohol use or related activities (IYS, 2021).

Perceptions of access increased with grade level with 22% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, 49% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, and 72% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students reporting it would be *easy* or *very easy* to get alcoholic beverages (IYS, 2021).

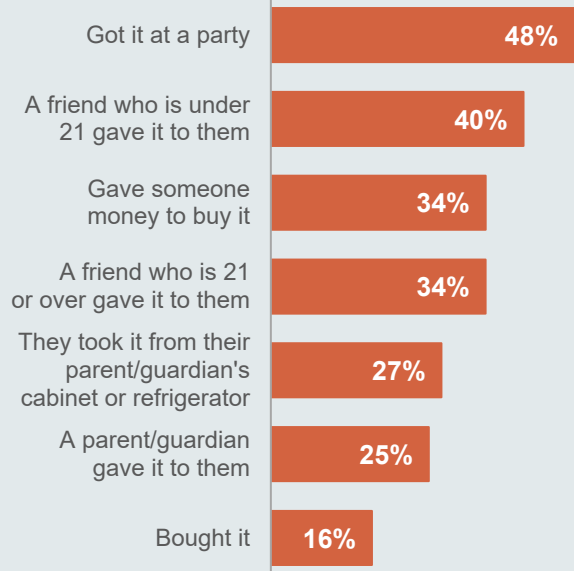
Perceptions of more favorable views about alcohol use and related-activities among their peer group also increased with grade level. Over one-third (37%) of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students reported *most* or *almost all* of the students in their grade would think it is okay to drink alcohol compared to only 4% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and 9% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (IYS, 2021). While 41% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students reported *most* or *almost all* of the students in their grade would think it is okay to go to a party where kids under 21 were drinking alcohol, only 5% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and 12% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students perceived the same (IYS, 2021).

Among Iowa youth, 11% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 19% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and 41% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported ever having had a drink (more than a few sips) of alcohol (beer, wine, alcoholic drinks, or hard liquor such as vodka, whiskey, rum, tequila, gin) (IYS, 2021). Across grades 6<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> combined, 23% of females and 23% of males reported ever having had a drink of alcohol.

Among 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in Iowa who have ever had a drink, over half (54%) were 15 years or older when they first drank alcohol, while 29% were 13 or 14 years old, and 18% were under age 11 (IYS, 2021).

Among 11<sup>th</sup> grade students who reported alcohol use in the past 30 days, about half (51%) reported binge drinking in the past 30 days (IYS, 2021). When all 11<sup>th</sup> grade students are considered, 9% reported binge drinking in the past 30 days, and

### Source of alcohol among 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in Iowa who reported past 30 day alcohol use (IYS, 2021)



Comparatively, 88% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, 87% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, and 76% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students reported their parents' or guardians' would *strongly disapprove* or *somewhat disapprove* of them drinking alcohol without their permission ([IYS, 2021](#)).

## Conclusions About Underage Drinking in Iowa

Although underage drinking has decreased over the past five years, the health and social consequences of alcohol use continue to be a serious public health problem in Iowa. Underage drinking among 12 to 20 year olds is significantly higher in Iowa compared to the U.S. national average. Iowa youth report having first used alcohol as young as nine years old, and a lower percentage of Iowa 6<sup>th</sup> graders perceive binge drinking to be a risk to physical or mental health than 8<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Alcohol use has been associated with financial, social, interpersonal and legal problems. Although Iowa data show alcohol use by 11<sup>th</sup> graders has been decreasing, just under 1 in 5 11<sup>th</sup> graders reported alcohol use in the past 30 days. To continue to reduce the use of alcohol among Iowa youth, prevention efforts need to focus on informing youth about the risks of alcohol use through evidence-based programs such as Life Skills Training, Guiding Good Choices, and Project ALERT to name a few; and supporting community policies including social host liability laws, alcohol compliance checks and enforcement of the minimum legal drinking age.

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For more prevention and treatment resources in Iowa, please visit the IDPH Substance Abuse Prevention website

<https://idph.iowa.gov/Bureau-of-Substance-Abuse/Prevention-Related-Programs>, or

[YourLifelowa.org](https://YourLifelowa.org)