

Alcohol Use and Risky Sex in New York City

Drinking alcohol causes many health risks, and excessive drinking is quite common. More than one in seven New York City (NYC) adults (15%) binge drink — consume five or more drinks on one occasion — at least once a month, similar to the prevalence nationwide (16%).

Alcohol abuse has an often-unrecognized impact on sexual behavior. Alcohol impairs judgment, leading to poor decisions, such as engaging in unplanned and unprotected sex. Because most people do not always use condoms, those with more sex partners are at greater risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV. STDs are major public health problems in NYC, with citywide HIV/AIDS rates among the highest in the nation.

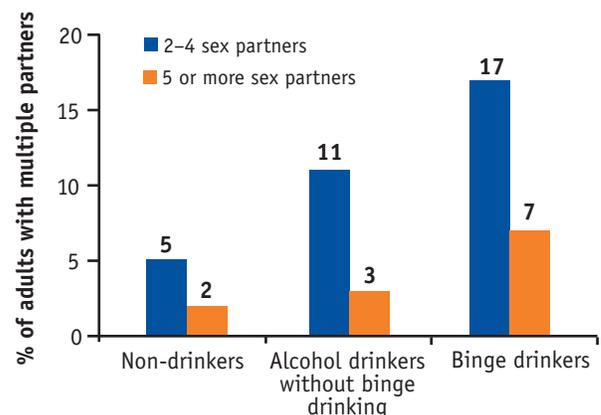
People under the influence of either alcohol or illicit drugs are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. Alcohol, however, may be responsible for more sexual HIV transmission than drugs because it is much more commonly used. In a large national study, men who had sex with men who drank heavily were twice as likely to become infected with HIV as non-drinkers, even after accounting for other risk factors, including illicit drug use.¹ Data show that policies that reduce alcohol use, such as increasing alcohol taxes and raising the minimum drinking age, have been associated with reductions in STDs.²

This report summarizes the effects of alcohol on risky sexual behaviors among New Yorkers. Recommendations and examples of effective alcohol interventions are on page four.

Adults who binge drink are more likely to have multiple sex partners

- Four in 10 NYC adults (39%) reported drinking alcohol without bingeing, 15% reported bingeing, and nearly half reported not drinking in the past month.
- Binge drinkers were more likely than drinkers who do not binge to report having two to four sex partners in the past year and three times as likely as non-drinkers. Binge drinkers also were three times as likely to report five or more partners as non-drinkers (7% vs. 2%).
- There was no difference in condom use between those who used alcohol and those who did not, but condom use was low in both groups. For example, four in ten adults with opposite-sex partners who had five or more partners in the past year reported not using a condom at last sex.

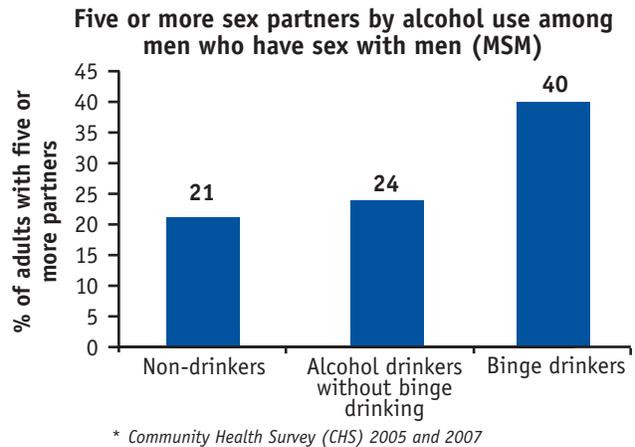
Multiple partners by alcohol use



This report is based on data from several surveys. The NYC Community Health Survey (CHS) is conducted by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Approximately 10,000 adults age 18 and older are interviewed about their health by telephone each year. Estimates presented here are from CHS 2007 and are age-adjusted, unless specified otherwise. For full survey details, visit nyc.gov/health/survey. National data on binge drinking are from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2007 (cdc.gov/brfss). The NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is a self-administered, anonymous questionnaire conducted in NYC public high schools every other year by the NYC Department of Education and the Health Department. Estimates presented here are from YRBS 2005 and 2007 combined. For full survey details, visit nyc.gov/html/doh/html/epi/srv/epi/srv-youthriskbehavior.shtml. The National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) project surveyed high-risk men who have sex with men (MSM) in 2004–05. For more information, see page two.

Among men who have sex with men, having multiple sex partners is more common among binge drinkers

- As seen among all adults, drinking alcohol and having multiple sex partners are related among men who reported having a male sex partner in the past year (MSM). Binge drinkers were twice as likely to have five or more sex partners as non-drinkers (40% vs. 21%).
- Overall, 26% of MSM said they had five or more sex partners in the past year, compared with 6% of other men.
- More than one in five MSM reported binge drinking at least once in the past month (24%), a higher proportion than the citywide average of 15%.



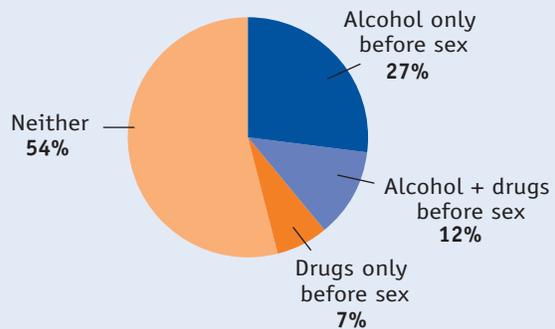
Understanding one hard-to-reach subgroup of MSM: National HIV Behavioral Surveillance in New York City

To collect detailed risk-behavior information among men who have sex with men (MSM) at high risk of HIV/AIDS, the Health Department conducted anonymous, in-person interviews in venues frequented by high-risk MSM (such as gay bars) as part of the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) project. MSM participating in this survey are not representative of MSM overall and are likely to engage in riskier behavior than all MSM (including those not reached in these venues). However, the data can show important relationships between behaviors in this high-risk group.

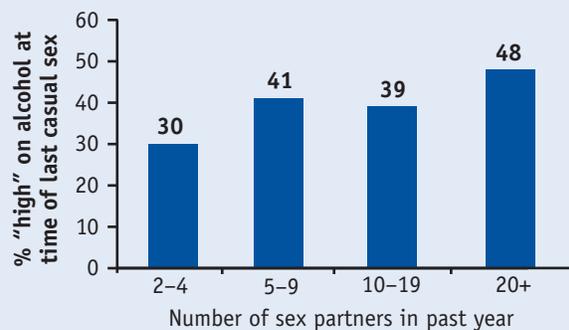
High-risk MSM with multiple partners frequently drink alcohol before sex

- More than one third of high-risk MSM with two or more sex partners (male or female) reported drinking alcohol before the last time they had sex with a casual male partner. They were also far more likely to drink than use drugs before sex.
- In general, the more sex partners high-risk MSM reported, the more likely they were to have sex with casual partners under the influence of alcohol. Among those reporting 20 or more partners per year, 48% were under the influence of alcohol at last casual sexual encounter.
- Those under the influence of alcohol the last time they had receptive anal sex with a casual partner were less likely to use a condom than those who were not under the influence of alcohol (65% vs. 86%).

Alcohol and/or drugs before sex among high-risk MSM with two or more sex partners



"High" on alcohol at last sex by number of sex partners among high-risk MSM

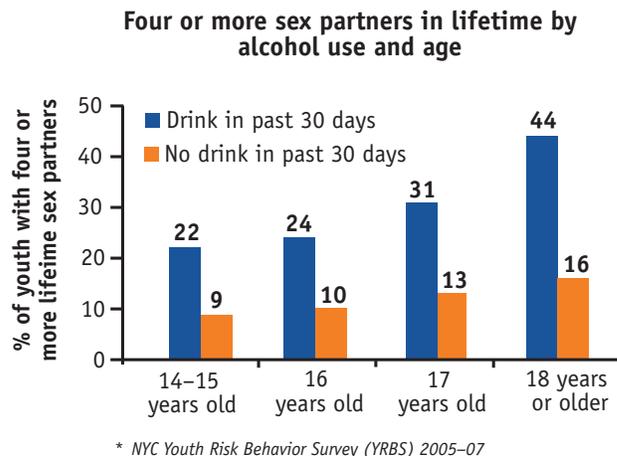


MSM who self-reported as HIV-positive, who had only one sex partner in the past year, or who had no casual male partners in the past year were excluded from this analysis.

Both charts: NHBS 2004-05

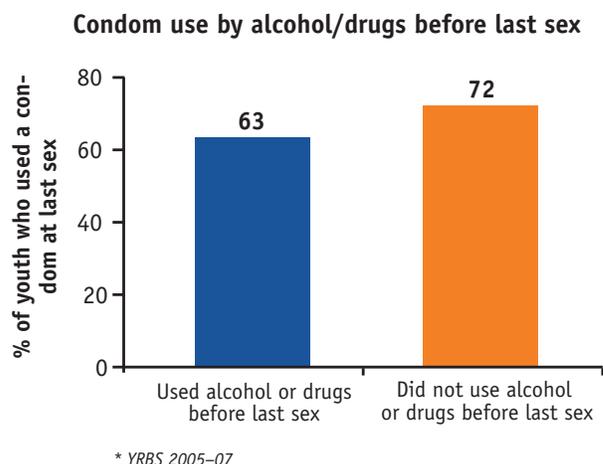
Teens who drink are more likely to have multiple sex partners

- Overall, 35% of public high school students reported drinking any alcohol, and 14% reported binge drinking in the past month.
- 17% (one in six youth) reported having four or more sex partners in their lifetime. Those who drank alcohol in the past 30 days were more than twice as likely to have had multiple sex partners as those who did not drink (27% vs. 11%).
- Although older teens were more likely to have multiple partners and to drink, the relationship between alcohol and multiple sex partners was seen at every age.



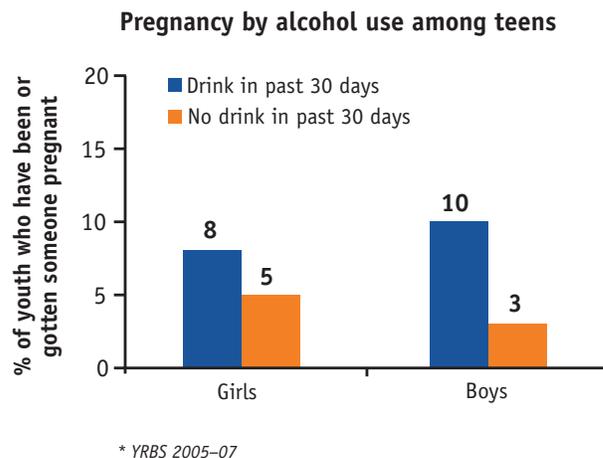
Teens who drink or use drugs before sex are less likely to use a condom

- Nearly one in three youth reported having sex in the past three months (31%). Of these recently sexually active teens, 15% used drugs or alcohol before their last sexual encounter.
- Recently sexually active teens who drank or used drugs before sex were less likely to have used a condom than those who did not use alcohol or drugs (63% vs. 72%).



Pregnancy is more common among youth who drink

- Teens who drank alcohol in the past month were nearly twice as likely to report having been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant as those who did not drink (9% vs. 4%).
- This relationship between alcohol and pregnancy was seen at every age and was stronger among boys than girls.
- Recently sexually active boys who drank or used drugs before the last time they had sex were three times as likely to report ever getting a girl pregnant as boys who did not report alcohol or drug use before sex (34% vs. 10%).



Recommendations

Alcohol impairs your judgment.

- People who drink alcohol heavily should reduce their drinking. For more information or help with alcohol or drug problems, call 311 and ask for LifeNet or call 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638).
- For those who choose to drink alcohol, men should not drink more than two drinks per day and women not more than one drink per day, especially in situations that could lead to risky casual sex.

Promising interventions that have been shown to reduce the health risks associated with harmful drinking include:

- Maintaining the minimum drinking age of 21.³
- Increasing enforcement of laws prohibiting sales of alcohol to youth.⁴
- Increasing taxes on alcohol, which have eroded with inflation over the past 50 years.⁵

References

Page 1:

¹ Koblin BA, et al. Risk factors for HIV infection among men who have sex with men. AIDS 2006;20:731-739.

² Chesson HW, et al. Sex under the influence: the effect of alcohol policy on sexually transmitted disease rates in the United States. J Law Econ 2000;43:215-238.

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³ Wagenaar AC, Toomey TL. Effects of minimum drinking age laws: review and analyses of the literature from 1960 to 2000. J Stud Alcohol Suppl 2002 Mar 14:206-225.

⁴ Wagenaar AC, Toomey TL, Erickson DJ. Complying with the minimum drinking age: effects of enforcement and training interventions. Alcohol Clin Exp Res 2005;29:255-262.

⁵ Chaloupka FJ, Grossman M, Saffer H. The effect of price on alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems. Alcohol Research and Health 2002;26:22-34.

A report from several New York City health surveys



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