

# The NSDUH Report

November 20, 2008

## Underage Alcohol Use: Where Do Young People Get Alcohol?

Although the use of alcohol is illegal for persons under the age of 21, its use constitutes one of the principal public health issues for this age group,<sup>1</sup> and reduction of underage alcohol use is a top public health priority of the Federal Government.<sup>2</sup> Many of

the efforts to prevent or reduce underage alcohol use attempt to reduce the availability of alcohol to underage drinkers. Data from the 2006 and 2007 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs) indicate that even with efforts to reduce availability, underage drinkers are still able to obtain alcohol.

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines how current (i.e., “past month”) drinkers aged 12 to 20 obtain alcohol, by age group and gender. The 2006 and 2007 NSDUHs included items that asked past month alcohol users aged 12 to 20 how they obtained the last alcohol they drank. This report also presents data on the prevalence of current underage alcohol use and findings on the average number of drinks that underage drinkers had on their last occasion of alcohol use, depending on where they obtained alcohol. All findings presented are annual averages based on combined 2006 and 2007 NSDUH data.

### In Brief

- More than one quarter (28.1 percent) of persons aged 12 to 20 used alcohol in the past month, including more than half (51.1 percent) of those aged 18 to 20, 25.9 percent of those aged 15 to 17, and 6.1 percent of those aged 12 to 14
- Nearly one third of current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 (30.6 percent) paid for the last alcohol they used, more than one in four (26.4 percent) got it for free from a nonrelative aged 21 or older, 14.6 percent got it for free from another underage person, 5.9 percent got it from a parent or guardian, and 8.5 percent got it from another relative aged 21 or older
- Current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 consumed more drinks on average the last time if they paid for the last alcohol they used (6.0 drinks) compared with those who did not pay for their last alcohol (3.9 drinks)

### What Percentage of Young People Are Underage Drinkers?

More than one quarter (28.1 percent) of persons aged 12 to 20 (an estimated 10.8 million persons) used alcohol in the past month. More than half (51.1 percent) of those aged 18 to 20 were current alcohol users compared with 25.9 percent of those aged 15 to 17 and 6.1 percent of those aged 12 to 14. Underage males were more likely than

their female counterparts to be current alcohol users (28.8 vs. 27.4 percent).

### How Do Current Alcohol Users Aged 12 to 20 Obtain Alcohol?

Nearly one third (30.6 percent) of current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 in 2006 and 2007 (an estimated 3.2 million persons) paid for the last alcohol they used, and 69.4 percent (an estimated 7.3 million persons) got the last alcohol they used for free. More than one in four (26.4 percent) got the last alcohol they used for free from a nonrelative aged 21 or older, 14.6 percent got it for free from another underage person, 5.9 percent got it from a parent or guardian, 8.5 percent got it from another relative aged 21 or older, and 3.9 percent took it from their own home without asking.<sup>3</sup>

### How Do Underage Drinkers in Different Age Groups Obtain Alcohol?

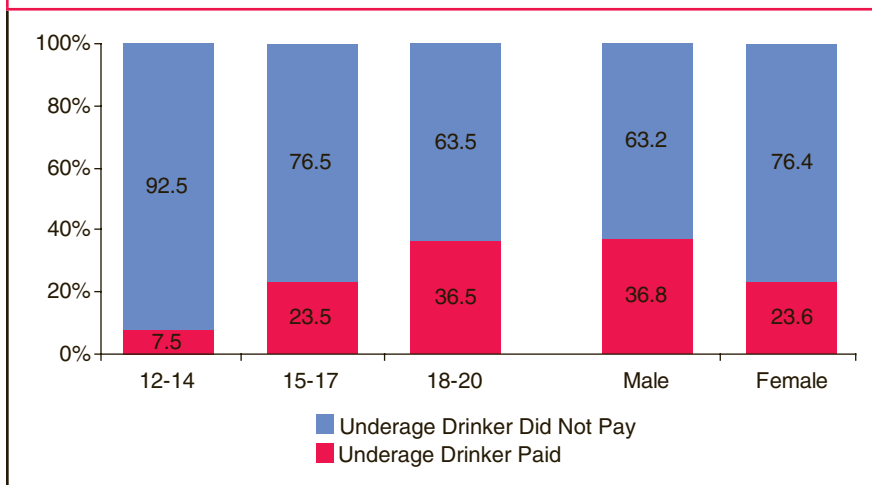
Among underage current alcohol users, over one third (36.5 percent) of persons aged 18 to 20 paid for the last alcohol they drank compared with 23.5 percent of those aged 15 to 17 and 7.5 percent of those aged 12 to 14 (Figure 1).

Current alcohol users aged 18 to 20 also were more likely than their younger counterparts to have gotten alcohol for free from a nonrelative of legal drinking age (30.5 percent compared with 20.3 percent of those aged 15 to 17 and 13.4 percent of those aged 12 to 14) (Figure 2). However, alcohol users aged 18 to 20 were less likely than those aged 12 to 14 to have gotten the last alcohol they used from a parent or guardian (4.2 vs. 16.6 percent), to have taken it from their own home without asking (2.2 vs. 14.0 percent), or to have gotten it from another underage person (11.1 vs. 18.6 percent).

### How Do Underage Males and Females Obtain Alcohol?

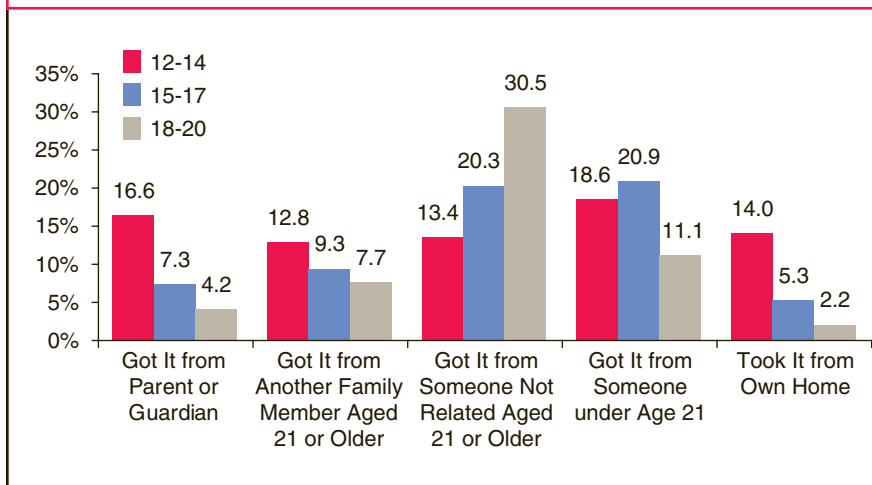
Underage male alcohol users were more likely than their female counterparts to have paid for the

**Figure 1. Payment or Receipt of Alcohol for Free for the Last Use in the Past Month among Alcohol Users Aged 12 to 20, by Age Group and Gender: Annual Averages, 2006 and 2007\***



Source: SAMHSA, 2006 and 2007 NSDUHs.

**Figure 2. Source of Alcohol Obtained for Free for the Last Use in the Past Month among Alcohol Users Aged 12 to 20, by Age Group: Annual Averages, 2006 and 2007\***



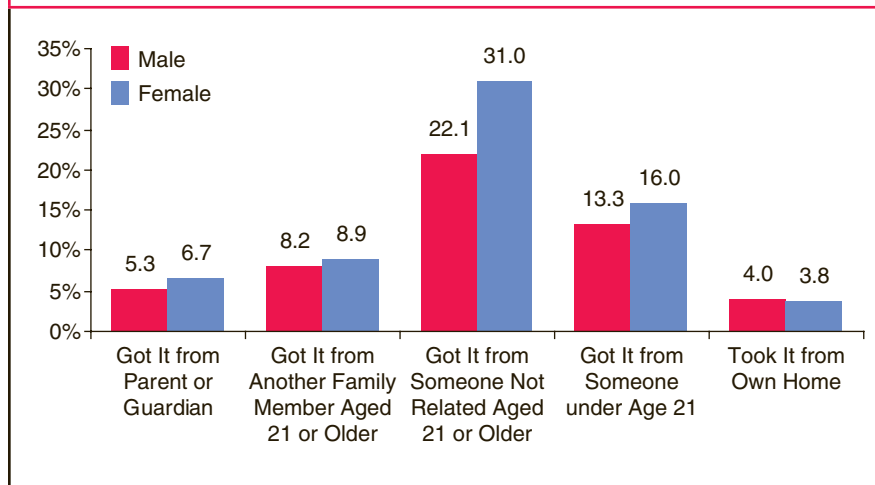
Source: SAMHSA, 2006 and 2007 NSDUHs.

last alcohol they used (36.8 vs. 23.6 percent) (Figure 1). Conversely, more than three fourths of female underage drinkers (76.4 percent) obtained their last alcohol for free compared with 63.2 percent of males. Female underage drinkers were more likely than their male counterparts to have gotten the last alcohol they used for free from a nonrelative of legal drinking age (31.0 vs. 22.1 percent) (Figure 3).

### How Many Drinks Do Underage Drinkers Have, Depending on How They Obtain Alcohol?

Current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 consumed more drinks on average the last time if they paid for the last alcohol they used (6.0 drinks) compared with those who did not pay for their last alcohol (3.9 drinks) (Table 1). Underage current drinkers who got alcohol for free from a nonrelative of legal

**Figure 3. Source of Alcohol Obtained for Free for the Last Use in the Past Month among Alcohol Users Aged 12 to 20, by Gender: Annual Averages, 2006 and 2007\***



Source: SAMHSA, 2006 and 2007 NSDUHs.

**Table 1. Mean Number of Drinks Consumed on Last Occasion of Alcohol Use in the Past Month among Past Month Alcohol Users Aged 12 to 20, by Age Group and Source of Last Alcohol Used: Annual Averages, 2006 and 2007**

Source of Last Alcohol Used in the Past Month*	Total		Age Group					
			12-14		15-17		18-20	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Total	4.6	0.05	2.8	0.11	4.4	0.07	4.8	0.07
Underage Drinker Paid	6.0	0.11	4.8	0.50	6.3	0.18	6.0	0.13
Underage Drinker Did Not Pay**	3.9	0.04	2.7	0.10	3.8	0.07	4.2	0.06
Got It from Parent or Guardian	2.5	0.10	1.7	0.11	2.1	0.11	3.1	0.19
Got It from Another Family Member Aged 21 or Older	3.6	0.16	2.3	0.18	3.5	0.25	3.9	0.23
Got It from Someone Not Related Aged 21 or Older	4.3	0.07	3.4	0.38	4.3	0.14	4.3	0.09
Got It from Someone under Age 21	4.2	0.09	3.2	0.25	4.0	0.12	4.5	0.13
Took It from Own Home	3.0	0.18	2.3	0.25	3.6	0.32	2.9	0.28

Source: SAMHSA, 2006 and 2007 NSDUHs.

drinking age consumed more drinks on average (4.3 drinks) than those who got the last alcohol they used from a parent or guardian (2.5 drinks).

These patterns also held within individual age groups of underage alcohol users. For example, current

alcohol users aged 12 to 14 who paid for the alcohol themselves consumed an average of 4.8 drinks the last time they drank compared with an average of 2.7 drinks if they did not pay for it. These 12 to 14 year olds consumed an average of 3.4 drinks if they got their

alcohol from a nonrelative aged 21 or older and 1.7 drinks if they got it from a parent or guardian. Among current alcohol users aged 18 to 20, those who paid for the last alcohol they used averaged 6.0 drinks compared with 4.2 drinks among those who got it for free.

## Discussion

Even with increased efforts to reduce the availability of alcohol to young people, data from NSDUH indicate that underage drinkers are able to purchase or obtain alcohol from relatives and friends at an unacceptably high rate. This should be of concern to professionals, policymakers, parents, and others who are attempting to reduce the negative consequences of underage alcohol use.

## End Notes

- 1 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2006, January). *Alcohol Alert No. 67: Underage drinking: Why do adolescents drink, what are the risks, and how can underage drinking be prevented?* [Available at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/AA67/AA67.htm>]
- 2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *The Surgeon General's call to action to prevent and reduce underage drinking*. Rockville, MD: Office of the Surgeon General. [Available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/>]
- 3 Other sources of alcohol for which underage drinkers did not pay include alcohol from someone else's house, alcohol that was obtained some other way, and situations in which underage persons did not pay for the last alcohol they used but the specific source was unknown.

## Table and Figure Notes

- \* Respondents with unknown responses were excluded.
- \*\* Underage drinkers who did not pay for the last alcohol they used include those who got alcohol from someone else's house, those who got it some other way, and those whose source was missing, as well as the respondents who reported getting alcohol without paying for it from the other sources shown in the report.

## Suggested Citation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (November 20, 2008). *The NSDUH Report: Underage Alcohol Use: Where Do Young People Get Alcohol?* Rockville, MD.

For change of address, corrections, or to be removed from this list, please e-mail: [shortreports@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:shortreports@samhsa.hhs.gov).

Research findings from the SAMHSA 2006 and 2007 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

## Underage Alcohol Use: Where Do Young People Get Alcohol?

- More than one quarter (28.1 percent) of persons aged 12 to 20 used alcohol in the past month, including more than half (51.1 percent) of those aged 18 to 20, 25.9 percent of those aged 15 to 17, and 6.1 percent of those aged 12 to 14
- Nearly one third of current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 (30.6 percent) paid for the last alcohol they used, more than one in four (26.4 percent) got it for free from a nonrelative aged 21 or older, 14.6 percent got it for free from another underage person, 5.9 percent got it from a parent or guardian, and 8.5 percent got it from another relative aged 21 or older
- Current alcohol users aged 12 to 20 consumed more drinks on average the last time if they paid for the last alcohol they used (6.0 drinks) compared with those who did not pay for their last alcohol (3.9 drinks)

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2006 and 2007 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 62,495 persons aged 12 to 20. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

*The NSDUH Report* is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

Information on the most recent NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Information for earlier NSDUHs is available in the following publication:

2006 NSDUH (DHHS Publication No. SMA 07-4293, NSDUH Series H-32)

Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.

Because of improvements and modifications to the 2002 NSDUH, estimates from the 2002 through 2007 surveys should not be compared with estimates from the 2001 or earlier versions of the survey to examine changes over time.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration  
Office of Applied Studies  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)