

ALCOHOL AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The data presented here on 11-15 year olds' drinking behaviour is taken from a series commissioned by the Department of Health on drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England¹.

Government guidelines introduced in December 2009 advise that under- 15s should not drink any alcohol and that children aged between 15 and 17 should drink only under adult supervision.

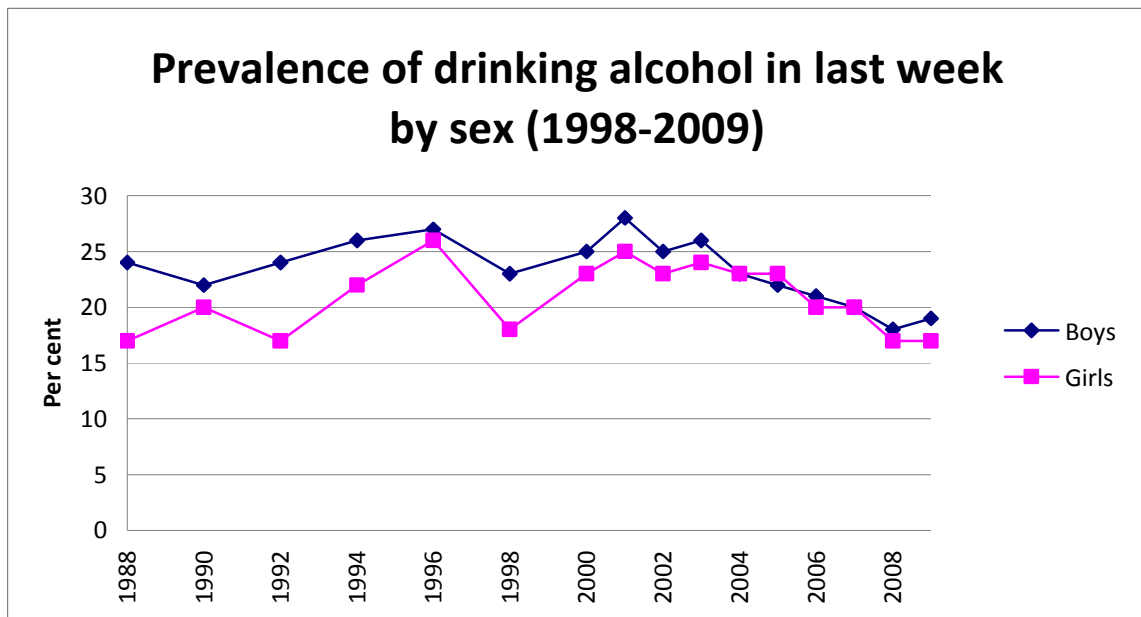
Headline findings 2009

- Half (51%) of pupils aged 11-15 have had at least one alcoholic drink in their lifetime.
- Likelihood of having ever had a drink increases with age from 16% of 11 year olds to 81% of 15 year olds.
- 18% of pupils had drunk alcohol in the past week, similar proportions of boys and girls.
- Among those pupils who had drunk alcohol in the past week, mean intake per week was 11.6 units. Boys drank more than girls and older pupils more than younger ones.
- Most pupils (66%) who drank in the last week had done so on only one day. On the days they did drink, 57% drank an average of more than four units.

Trend data

- The proportion of pupils who have never had an alcoholic drink has increased from 39% in 2003 to 49% in 2009.
- Measuring trends in the volume of consumption by 11-15 year olds is difficult because of a survey methodology change that was introduced in 2007 and which causes the data to show an apparent steep increase in mean consumption between 2006 and 2008. Taking into account this methodological change, however, it is likely that there has been little change in the average drinking levels among those pupils who drink since 2001.
- Among those 11-15 year olds who drink alcohol, the proportion who do so in pubs or bars has fallen from 13% in 1996 to 7% in 2008.
- There has been an increase over the same period in the proportion who usually drink at home or someone else's home (from 52% to 64%), at parties with friends (from 23% to 33%) or outdoors (from 21% in 1999 to 27% in 2008).
- There has been broad convergence in prevalence of drinking in the last week for boys and girls. The proportion of pupils who had drunk alcohol in the past week peaked at 28% for boys and 25% for girls in 2001 and has since decreased to 19% and 17% respectively in 2009.

¹ The latest published report in this series is "Smoking, drinking and drug use amongst young people in England in 2009" published on 22 July 2010 by the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care.



Characteristics of drinkers aged 15 and under

- Eleven year olds who drink alcohol are most likely to drink with their parents (64%) or other family members (16%), and are most likely to drink at home (61%).
- By the age of 15, pupils are most likely to drink with friends of both sexes (69 % of 15 year old drinkers). They are less likely than younger pupils to drink at home (37%) and more likely to drink in other locations; 45% drink at parties with friends, 38% in someone else's home, and 34% outside (on the street, in a park or somewhere else).
- Around half of current drinkers – pupils who said they drank at all – didn't usually buy alcohol (48%). Those who do buy alcohol are most likely to buy it from friends or relatives (24% of current drinkers, a substantial increase from 9% in 1998).
- Whether pupils drink alcohol is related to the number of drinkers pupils live with. The proportion of pupils who had drunk alcohol in the last week increased from 5% of those who lived in non-drinking households to 31% of those who lived with three or more people who drank alcohol.
- Pupils' drinking tended to reflect what they believed their parents thought. For example, 80% of pupils who said their parents would not like them to drink had never drunk alcohol, compared with 24% of pupils who thought their parents did not mind them drinking within limits.