



Alcohol Use Trends Among College Students

To better understand patterns of substance use among Texas college students, Texans For Safe and Drug-Free Youth (TxSDY) continues to monitor use rates and trends using a variety of data sources. Primarily, TxSDY compiles statewide data from 1) the Texas Survey of Substance Use Among College Students (TSCS), conducted by the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M every two years, 2) the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and 3) the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)

Alcohol Use

Alcohol remains the drug of choice among Texas college students. According to the 2021 Texas Survey of Substance Abuse Among College Students (TSCS), 73% of Texas college students reported ever using alcohol, 65% reported using alcohol in the past year, and 51% reported using alcohol in the past month (TSCS, 2021). These figures are similar to 2019, where lifetime alcohol use was 77%, past year alcohol use was 71%, and past month alcohol use was 55% (TSCS, 2019). Nationally, 49% of full-time college students reported using alcohol in the past month (calculated by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA] using National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data, 2021).

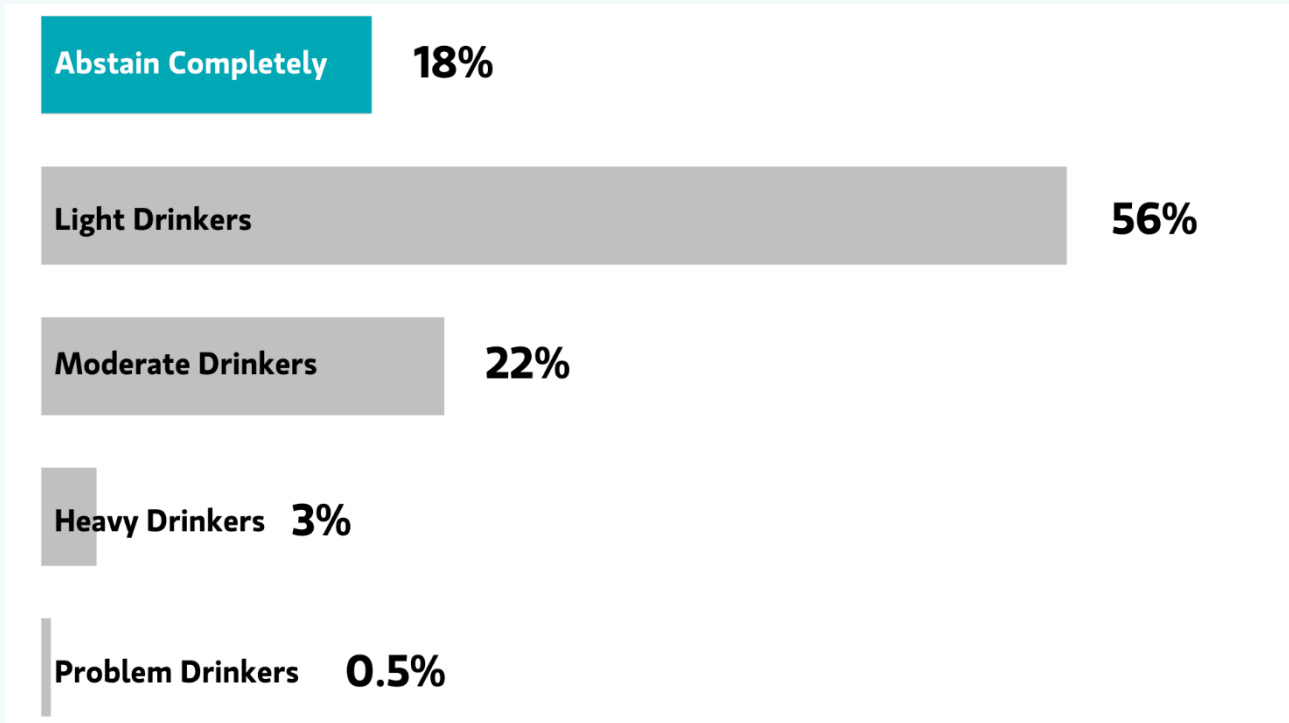
In Texas, a majority of students reported themselves to be light drinkers (56%) as opposed to moderate (22%), heavy (3%), or problem (0.5%) drinkers. Additionally, 17% of students reported abstaining from alcohol use altogether (Figure 1).



Figure 1.

A majority of Texas college students consider themselves to be light drinkers.

Nearly **1 in 5** (18%) say they **do not drink** at all.



Source: PPRI, Texas Survey of Substance Use Among College Students (2017)

Binge drinking (five or more drinks in one sitting for males, or 4 or more drinks in one sitting for females) remains a concern among college students in Texas. Among students who drink, 30% of males and 33% of females reported binge drinking in the past month (TSCS, 2021). It is worth noting that for the first time since at least 2005, the number of females who reported binge drinking is higher than males. However, males who binge drank tended to do so more than females: 5% of males and 3% of females reported binge drinking six or more times in the past month.



Underage Alcohol Use

In 2021, the TSCS showed that 62% of Texas college students under the age of 21 reported ever using alcohol, 53% reported using alcohol in the past year, and 38% reported using alcohol in the past month. Friends over the age of 21 are the typical source of alcohol for these students (61%). Other typical sources of alcohol for underage students include parents or relatives (56%) and friends under 21 (28%). (Table 1).

Table 1.

Students under 21 get alcohol socially.

The most common source is friends over 21.

Friend Over 21	61%
Parent or Relative	56%
Friend Under 21	28%

Source: PPRI, Texas Survey of Substance Use Among College Students (2021)

In addition to the typical sources of alcohol previously mentioned, 8% of underage students also report obtaining alcohol using a fake ID. Additionally, 17% of underage students said they were able to get alcohol at bars or stores because they weren't carded (TSCS, 2021). See Table 2 for typical places where underage students obtain alcohol without being carded.

Table 2.

Underage Texas college students aren't always carded at restaurants, bars, and other stores.

Restaurants are the most common location where students say they aren't asked to show ID.

Restaurants	27%
Gas Stations	23%
Grocery/Liquor Stores	17%
Off-Campus Bars	17%
On-Campus Bars	4%

Source: PPRI, Texas Survey of Substance Use Among College Students (2021)



High-Risk Groups for Heavy Drinking

- 1. Students in fraternities/sororities.** Involvement in the Greek system is associated with higher rates of alcohol use and binge drinking. The 2021 TSCS found that 69% of fraternity or sorority members had used alcohol in the past month, versus 46% of non-members.
- 2. Athletes.** The 2017 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) National Study of Substance Use Habits of College Student-Athletes reported that 42% of student-athletes engage in binge drinking.
- 3. First-year students.** First-year college students are also a high-risk group for heavy drinking and alcohol-related problems due to social pressures and expectations, especially in the first six weeks of college (NIAAA, 2019).

Research by the NIAAA and others consistently shows that students underestimate how much alcohol they consume. When students misperceive their level of alcohol use, they lack motivation to change their behavior because they do not believe their alcohol use is a problem or related to negative consequences they may be experiencing (for example, poor academic performance). For that reason, Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth has worked with campuses throughout the Texas to implement Screening and Brief Intervention as a research-based prevention strategy to help students assess and consider ways they may want to change their drinking behaviors. For more information on this program, visit [TxSDY.org](https://txsdy.org) or contact Texans for Safe and Drug-Free Youth at info@txsdy.org or 512.442.7501.



Impaired Driving Among Texas College Students

Alcohol-Impaired Driving

Though the 2021 TSCS shows a decrease in the number of students that reported driving impaired, one of the places students continue to put themselves at risk is behind the wheel of a car. The 2021 TSCS reports that 12% of Texas college students report driving after drinking at least once a month, compared to 17% of college students nationally (Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, 2017). Approximately 3% of students reported driving at least once in an average month after consuming 5 or more drinks (TSCS, 2021). Even if they aren't getting behind the wheel after drinking, Texas college students still put themselves at risk by riding in a car with a driver who was high or drunk: 19% of college students indicated they had done so at least once in a typical month (TSCS, 2021).

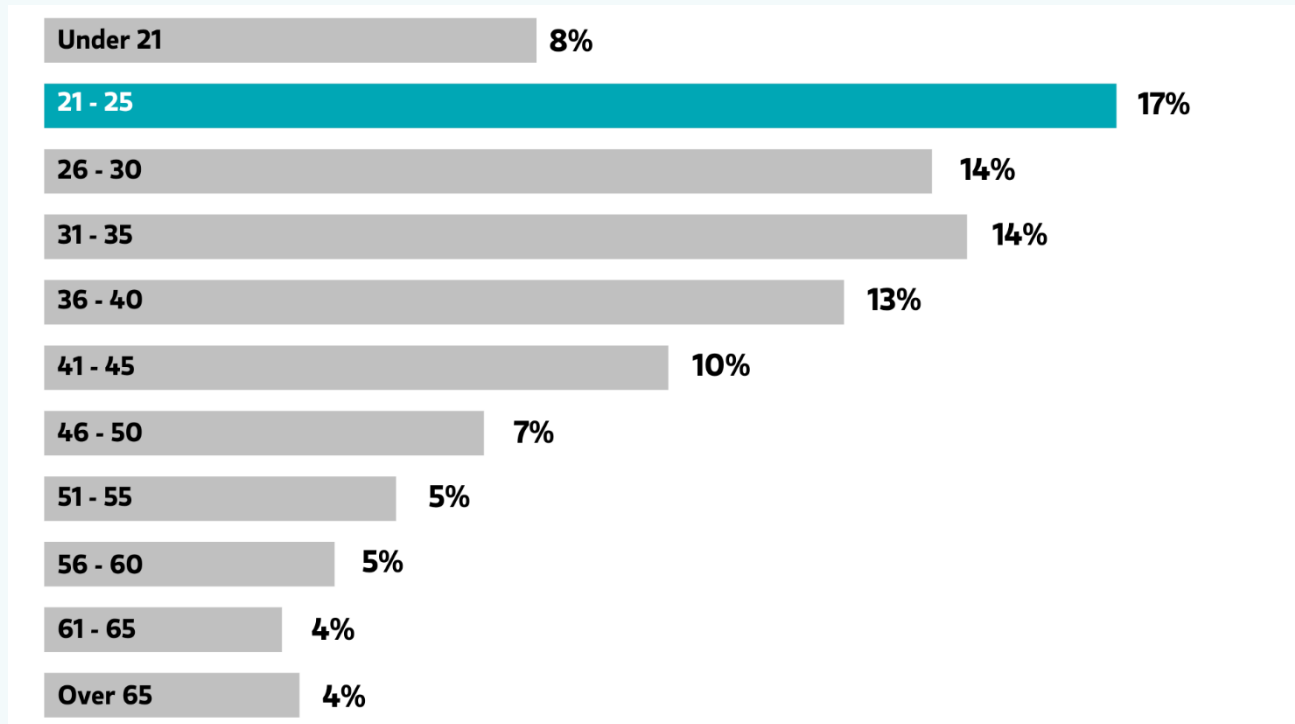
Given the number of alcohol-related crashes in Texas, the impaired driving numbers are particularly concerning. In 2021, 4,498 people were killed in traffic crashes in Texas (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA], 2023). Of those, 42% (1,468) were killed in alcohol-related crashes, which far exceeds the nationwide percentage of 31%. According to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), in 2022, 26% of drivers in alcohol-related crashes were age 25 or under. Of the 1,044 drunk drivers killed in fatal car crashes in 2022, one quarter (25%) were age 25 years and younger. (Figure 2). Additionally, Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) data indicate that in 2018, 4,525 youth under age 21 were arrested for DUI, and 20 to 24-year-olds (typical college age) accounted for 12,507 (17%) of all DUI arrests. The data suggest that efforts to prevent and reduce underage and risky alcohol use are a critical component when it comes to making Texas roads safer.



Figure 2

In 2022, one-quarter of drunk drivers killed in fatal car crashes were age 25 and under.

21 – 25-year-olds account for the largest percentage of drunk drivers killed in fatal car crashes.



Source: Texas Department of Transportation (2022)

Other Drugs and Impaired Driving

Current trends reveal that impaired driving due to prescription drug abuse and marijuana use is a growing concern. In fact, after alcohol, marijuana is the drug most commonly found in drivers' blood (National Institute of Drug Abuse 2016). In Texas, drugs (not including alcohol) were a contributing factor in 2,605 crashes in 2022 (TxDOT, 2022).

The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) also reports that 1 in 6 college students drove under the influence of a drug other than alcohol at least once in the past year. In Texas, 10% of



college students say they drove stoned or high in the past month, and 19% say they rode in a car with someone who was high or drunk (TSCS, 2021).

Studies show that both marijuana and prescription drugs increase crash risk because they impair users' ability to drive. Most notably, marijuana impairs perception, reaction time, and coordination, while many prescription drugs impair cognitive function and cause drowsiness. Yet changing attitudes around these substances show that people do not perceive driving under their influence to be as risky as it actually is. In fact, one recent study exploring college students' beliefs and behaviors about driving while high found that "college students overwhelmingly view drinking alcohol and driving as unacceptable, but are more tolerant of driving after smoking marijuana" (Davis and Sloas, 2017). The study also found that students who smoke marijuana often times serve as the "designated driver" for students who are both drunk and high.

Both marijuana and prescription drug use rates are concerning for several reasons, but they are especially worrisome from a public health and safety standpoint. The age range of 19-24 is associated with the highest prevalence of periodic heavy alcohol consumption, and this type of heavy or binge drinking is a leading factor in alcohol-impaired driving. Many college students have a casual attitude about driving after smoking marijuana, which can lead to impaired driving and create an even bigger danger on Texas roads. That in mind, it is becoming increasingly important to address alcohol and other drugs as a part of impaired driving prevention efforts.

**To learn more, contact us at info@TxSDY.org
or visit us online at TxSDY.org.**



Resources

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