



Heavy drinking and binge drinking rise sharply in US counties

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As rates of any drinking remained largely unchanged, binge drinking and heavy drinking have increased at the county level, influenced mainly by higher rates of drinking among women

SEATTLE - Today, Americans are more likely to be heavy drinkers and binge drinkers than in recent years due in large part to rising rates of drinking among women, according to a new analysis of county-level drinking patterns in the United States.

By contrast, the percentage of people who drink any alcohol has remained relatively unchanged over time, according to the latest research by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington.

Published in the *American Journal of Public Health* on April 23, the study "[Drinking patterns in US counties from 2002 to 2012](#)" is the first to track trends in alcohol use at the county level. Its findings focus on Americans aged 21 and older. The study was presented at the Association of Health Care Journalists conference.

Heavy drinking among Americans has increased sharply, up 17.2% since 2005. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines heavy drinking as exceeding an average of one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men over the past month.

In 2012, 8.2% of all Americans were considered heavy drinkers and 18.3% were binge drinkers. Madison County, Idaho, had the lowest levels of binge drinking in 2012 (5.9%), while Menominee, Wisconsin, had the highest rates of binge drinking (36% among residents). For heavy drinking, Hancock County, Tennessee, had the fewest heavy drinkers (2.4% of its population) and Esmeralda County, Nevada, recorded the largest proportion of heavy drinkers (22.4%).

Nationally, 18.3% of people were binge drinkers in 2012, which the CDC defines as consuming four drinks or more for women and five drinks or more for men on a single occasion at least once during the past month. Since 2005, binge drinking has increased 8.9% across the US.

Nationwide, women showed a much faster escalation in binge drinking than men, with rates rising 17.5% between 2005 and 2012; men, on the other hand, saw rates of binge drinking increase 4.9%.

"We are seeing some very alarming trends in alcohol overconsumption, especially among women," said Dr. Ali Mokdad, a lead author of the study and professor at IHME. "We also can't ignore the fact that in many US counties a quarter of the people, or more, are binge drinkers."

These rising rates of heavy and binge drinking starkly contrast with America's trends for drinking any alcohol, which have remained largely unchanged over time (56% of people in the US consumed any alcohol in 2005 and 2012).

Some regional drinking patterns emerged at the national level, with several areas in the West, Midwest, and New England showing higher levels of alcohol consumption, particularly in comparison with a number of counties in the southern United States and Utah. But beyond regional comparisons, the most striking disparities in alcohol use were found within state lines.

In Texas, for example, rates of overall binge drinking ranged from 10.8% in Collingsworth County, well below the national average of 18.3%, to 35.5% in Loving County, nearly twice the national average in 2012. These county-level findings, which can be [explored with IHME's US Health Map data visualization tool](#), highlight the need for more locally focused alcohol policies and programs.

"In the US, state-level results often mask the full range of what people are experiencing health-wise," said IHME's Director Dr. Christopher Murray. "When you can map out what's happening county by county, over time, and for men and women separately, that's also when you can really pinpoint specific health needs and challenges - and then tailor health policies and programs accordingly."

Binge drinking is commonly associated with a higher risk for serious bodily harm, such as injuries, alcohol poisoning and acute organ damage. Heavy drinking is considered a risk factor for longer-term conditions, such as liver cirrhosis and cardiovascular disease.

Counties with highest rates of binge drinking, both sexes

Rank	State	County	2012 Both Sexes
1	Wisconsin	Menominee County	36.0%
2	Texas	Loving County	35.5%
3	Nebraska	Nance County	35.2%
4	North Dakota	Renville County	34.2%
5	Nevada	Esmeralda County	33.8%
6	North Dakota	Steele County	33.6%
7	North Dakota	Nelson County	33.5%
8	Michigan	Ontonagon County	33.3%
9	Montana	Toole County	33.2%

10	North Dakota	Burke County	33.0%
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Counties with highest rates of heavy drinking, both sexes

Rank	State	County	2012 Both Sexes
1	Nevada	Esmeralda County	22.4%
2	North Dakota	Sioux County	21.4%
3	North Dakota	Rolette County	19.6%
4	Michigan	Ontonagon County	19.3%
5	Montana	Petroleum County	19.0%
6	Colorado	San Miguel County	18.9%
7	Nevada	Storey County	18.6%
8	Colorado	Summit County	18.6%
9	South Dakota	Buffalo County	18.3%
10	Colorado	Hinsdale County	18.2%

Counties with highest rates of any drinking, both sexes

Rank	State	County	2012 Both Sexes
1	Virginia	Falls Church City	78.7%
2	Colorado	Summit County	78.6%
3	Colorado	Pitkin County	78.0%
4	Colorado	Routt County	76.7%
5	Colorado	San Miguel County	76.4%
6	Colorado	Ouray County	74.9%

7	Wyoming	Teton County	74.9%
8	Colorado	Hinsdale County	74.3%
9	Wisconsin	Ozaukee County	73.3%
10	Wisconsin	Portage County	73.3%

Counties with lowest rates of binge drinking, both sexes

Rank	State	County	2012 Both Sexes
1	Idaho	Madison County	5.9%
2	Utah	Utah County	6.5%
3	Tennessee	Hancock County	7.1%
4	Utah	Cache County	7.6%
5	Tennessee	Johnson County	7.8%
6	Utah	Rich County	8.0%
7	Idaho	Franklin County	8.0%
8	Idaho	Bear Lake County	8.1%
9	Tennessee	Grainger County	8.2%
10	Utah	Sevier County	8.4%

Counties with lowest rates of heavy drinking, both sexes

Rank	State	County	2012 Both Sexes
1	Tennessee	Hancock County	2.4%
2	Idaho	Madison County	2.7%
3	Texas	Collingsworth County	2.8%

4	Colorado	Kiowa County	3.1%
5	Utah	Utah County	3.1%
6	Tennessee	Grainger County	3.2%
7	Oklahoma	Grant County	3.2%
8	Kentucky	Bell County	3.3%
9	Oklahoma	Dewey County	3.4%
10	Tennessee	Johnson County	3.4%

Counties with lowest rates of any drinking, both sexes

Rank	State	County	2012 Both Sexes
1	Idaho	Madison County	11.0%
2	Utah	Utah County	14.3%
3	Idaho	Franklin County	16.6%
4	Utah	Rich County	17.9%
5	Idaho	Bear Lake County	17.9%
6	West Virginia	McDowell County	18.6%
7	Utah	Cache County	18.6%
8	Tennessee	Hancock County	18.7%
9	Idaho	Oneida County	19.3%
10	Utah	Juab County	19.4%

Download the study at: <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302313>.

Download data for counties in each state and the District of Columbia at <http://www.healthdata.org/us-health/data-download>.

Explore US trends in alcohol use and other health indicators using the US Health Map data visualization tool:

<http://vizhub.healthdata.org/us-health-map/>.

The **Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME)** is an independent global health research organization at the University of Washington that provides rigorous and comparable measurement of the world's most important health problems and evaluates the strategies used to address them. IHME makes this information widely available so that policymakers have the evidence they need to make informed decisions about how to allocate resources to best improve population health.

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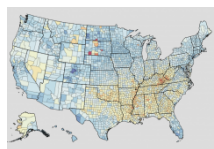
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