

KidsHealth® KidsPoll—Alcohol Poll: Summary of Findings

KidsHealth KidsPoll is collaboration among the Nemours Foundation/KidsHealth, the Department of Health Education and Recreation at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, the National Association of Health Education Centers, and participating health education centers. The purpose is to gather information (opinions, attitudes, and feelings etc.) about current health issues from children. The information is gathered using handheld data collection devices from children ages 9 to 13 as they attend classes in the health education centers. The information is shared with educators, caregivers, healthcare organizations, the media and other interested parties at the national and local levels. The goal is to provide insightful information that will enable them to develop programs to help children to make healthy life decisions, prevent disease and injury, and understand their bodies. This poll focused on issues related to alcohol.

Individual Demographics

Individual-level information was collected anonymously from each child who participated.

- 690 children
- 52% boys, 48% girls
- 9-13 (average age 10.5)
- 6 centers participated in this poll:
 - Children’s Health Education Center—Milwaukee, WI
 - Health World Children’s Museum—Barrington, IL
 - HealthWorks! Kids Museum—South Bend, IN
 - Lilly Health Education Center—Indianapolis, IN
 - Poe Center for Health Education—Raleigh, NC
 - Weller Health Education Center—Eaton, PA

School demographics

School-level information was not collected from each child, but is based on statistics for the schools that the children were from. Seven non-public school groups also participated (e.g., private or home school groups); school-level data for these non-school groups were not available and therefore were not included in the school-level analyses.

- 15 schools (21 public, 4 private school/groups)
- 64% White, 23% Black, 9% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific, 1% Native American
 - 61% of the schools had student bodies that were 0-33% Black/Hispanic/Asian/Native American combined
 - 27% of the schools had student bodies that were 33-67% of these groups
 - 12% of the schools had student bodies that were 67-100% of these groups

- 39% students in participating schools qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 57% of the schools had 0-33% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 33% of the schools had 33-67% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch
 - 10% of the schools had 67-100% of their student body qualifying for free or reduced lunch

The U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Dept of Education use a measure of city size and location called a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The categories for MSA are:

- *Large city center = center of a MSA city with population >250,000*
 - *Midsized city center = center of a MSA city with a population <250,000*
 - *Large city fringe = urban fringe of a large MSA city*
 - *Midsized city fringe = urban fringe of a midsized MSA city*
 - *Large town = not within a MSA with a population >25,000*
 - *Small town = not within an MSA with a population 2,500-25,000*
 - *Rural outside = not within an MSA with a population <2,500*
 - *Rural inside = population <2,500, coded rural, within a census MSA*
- Of the participating schools: 28% large city center, 13% mid-size city center, 17% large city fringe, 33% mid-size city fringe, 8% rural inside MSA
 - Average school size—635
 - 47% of participants were from schools that had enrollment of 250-500
 - 27% enrollment of 500-750
 - 7% enrollment of 750-1000
 - 19% enrollment of 1000+

Significant Demographic Associations

- There was a high correlation between proportion of schools with more non-white students and proportion receiving lunch assistance ($r = 0.73$).
- Younger kids were more likely to be from large cities or fringe

Statistically Significant Findings—overall

- *Question: How often do you drink more than just a sip of alcohol?*
 - A. *Never*
 - B. *I tried drinking once*
 - C. *Once in a while, but not every month*
 - D. *Every month, but not every week*
 - E. *About every week*

Seventy-two percent said they have never had more than a sip, with another 18% saying they have tried it only once. Four percent admitted to drinking once-in-a-while, 3% every month, and

3% every week. These findings are similar to those seen in other national surveys. Girls were more likely to say they have never had more than a sip (78% vs. 67%). Younger kids were also more likely to say they have never had more than a sip (9—82%, 10—76%, 11—66%, 12/13—64%).

- *Question: Teens who drink are:*
 - A. Very cool*
 - B. Sort of cool*
 - C. Sort of un-cool*
 - D. Very un-cool*

The vast majority of respondents (86%) believe teens who drink are *very un-cool*. Kids who drink themselves had much more favorable opinions. Forty-two percent of those who drink weekly and 29% of those who drink monthly believe teens who drink are *very cool* (compared to 3-7% of those who drink once in a while or less). There were no differences by age or gender.

- *Question: Drinking alcohol at my age is:*
 - A. Always OK*
 - B. OK most of the time*
 - C. Hardly ever OK*
 - D. Never OK*

Nearly 90% of the kids believe drinking at their age is *never OK*. Again, those who drink themselves are more likely to think it is OK. Half the weekly drinkers and 34% of the monthly drinkers believe it is *always* or *most of the time OK* for kids their age to drink. There were no differences by age or gender.

- *Question: Drinking alcohol while a teenager in highschool is:*
 - A. Always OK*
 - B. OK most of the time*
 - C. Hardly ever OK*
 - D. Never OK*

Two-thirds of the kids surveyed believe it is *never OK* for teens to drink and another 21% believe it is *hardly ever OK*. The oldest kids (12-13) were more likely to think drinking as a teen is *always* or *most of the time OK* (41% vs. 7% for other ages). Again, the more often a kid drinks the more likely he/she was to think it is *always* or *most of the time OK* for teens to drink (never—73%, tried once—55%, once-in-a-while—38%, every month—42%, every week—16%). There was no difference by gender.

- *Question: How often have you been offered alcohol?*
 - A. never*
 - B. once or twice, but not very often*
 - C. a few times a year*
 - D. several times a month*

The majority of the kids surveyed (71%) said they have never been offered alcohol. Girls were less likely to have been offered alcohol (76% vs. 66%). Those who drink the most were also the

most likely to have been offered alcohol frequently (*about every week*) (never drink—3%, tried once—5%, once-in-a-while—11%, every month—17%, every week—55%). There was no difference by age.

- *Question: Who offers you alcohol the most?*
 - A. No one*
 - B. Kids my age*
 - C. Older kids*
 - D. Adults I know*
 - E. Someone else*

Again, two-thirds of the kids said no one offers them alcohol. Of those who have been offered alcohol, 34% said it was by *adults they knew*, 29% *older kids*, 17% *kids their age*, and 20% *someone else*. Boys were more likely to say *adults they knew* (39% vs. 30%) and girls were more likely to say *kids their age* (23% vs. 12%). The most frequent drinkers (every week) were more likely to say *kids my age* (53% vs. 0-19%) and less likely to say *older kids* (7% vs. 22-25%). There was no pattern by age.

- *Question: How many kids your age have had more than just a sip of alcohol?*
 - A. Almost no one*
 - B. Some*
 - C. About half*
 - D. Many*
 - E. Almost everyone*

Forty-six percent believe almost none of the kids their age have drunk alcohol and another 28% said some. More than ¼ believe that half or more of the kids their age have drunk alcohol. Girls were slightly more likely to believe *almost everyone* has had more than a sip (13% vs. 7%). Older children were more likely to believe that kids their age are experimenting with alcohol. For example: 11% of 9 yr olds, 21% of 10 year olds, 25% of 11 year olds, and 53% of 12/13 year olds believe half or more of the kids their age have had more than a sip. Additionally, kids who drink were more likely to think half or more of the kids their age have had more than a sip (never drink—17%, tried once—43%, once-in-a-while—49%, every month—75%, every week—94%).

- *Question: Of the following choices, what is the main reason kids try alcohol?*
 - A. Other kids are doing it*
 - B. They want to be like adults who drink*
 - C. They just want to see what it is like*
 - D. They have nothing else to do*
 - E. They think it will make them cool*

The majority of the kids surveyed (56%) believe kids try alcohol because *they think it will make them cool*. This is followed by 15% naming *other kids are doing it*, 14% naming *to see what it is like*, 7% naming *to be like adults*, and 5% naming *nothing else to do*. These proportions were nearly identical by gender and age. Frequent drinkers were more likely to name *nothing else to do* (never drink—2%, tried once—5%, once-in-a-while—18%, every month—17%, every week—35%). Frequent drinkers were less likely to name *make them cool* (see table) and *other kids are doing it* (see table). In fact, not one weekly drinker named *other kids are doing it*.

- *Question: Of the following choices, what is the best way to keep kids from drinking alcohol?*
 - A. Have their nurse or doctor talk to them*
 - B. Teach lessons at school*
 - C. Have people with alcohol problems talk to them*
 - D. Let them learn from their own experiences*
 - E. Give them other fun things to do*

Give them other fun things to do was consistently the top recommendation for keeping kids from drinking alcohol (36% of all respondents). Older kids were more likely to name *have people with alcohol problems talk to kids* and *let them learn from their own experiences*, and less likely to name *have a doctor or nurse talk to them* (see table). There were no patterns based on frequency of drinking.

Key findings worth highlighting

As may be expected, older kids are more likely to be experimenting with alcohol. In addition, boys are slightly more likely to drink alcohol. The majority of kids seem to have a negative attitude toward drinking generally and toward kids and teens who drink. About 1/3 of kids 9-13 have been offered alcohol and it is commonly offered by adults they know or older kids. Normative beliefs about alcohol are somewhat inaccurate with kids of every age believing that alcohol experimentation is more common than what is admitted.

Of interest are variations of beliefs and attitudes among those who drink more frequently. As can be expected, frequent drinkers tend to be older and have more favorable attitudes toward drinking alcohol. Those who drink more frequently are also offered alcohol much more frequently. The most frequent drinkers (weekly) often seem to be getting the alcohol from kids their age. A large majority of frequent drinkers incorrectly believe that most of the kids their age are also experimenting with alcohol. For example, 94% of the weekly drinkers and 75% of the monthly drinkers believe half or more of the kids their age have had more than just a sip of alcohol. When in fact, 72% of the kids say they have never had a drink and another 18% say they have tried it only once.

If we want to prevent frequent drinking among this age group, we need to pay attention to what these frequent drinkers are saying. They say its not peer pressure, but boredom and desire to be cool that leads to drinking. They also say giving them other fun things to do is a key prevention tactic that may be often overlooked.

for additional information contact:
Stephen L. Brown PhD
Health Education and Recreation
Southern Illinois University
Mailcode 4632
Carbondale IL 62901-4632
(618) 453-1863
slbrown@siu.edu