



# Underage Drinking in Utah

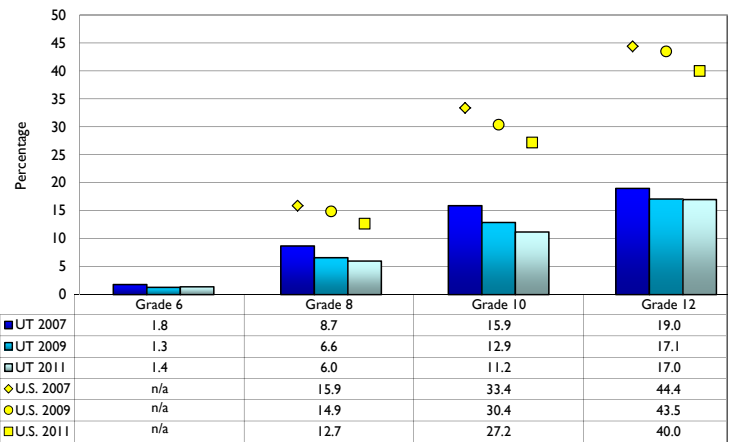
March 2013

## Youth Alcohol Consumption

When it comes to alcohol use, survey data show that Utah youth drink alcohol at much lower rates than the national average<sup>1</sup>. This is true of lifetime alcohol use (“have you ever used alcohol in your lifetime”), past 30 day use, and binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row) in the past two weeks. In fact, historically, alcohol use rates among Utah youth have been about 50% of the national rate. For example, the 30 day use rate in 2011 for Utah 12th graders was 17%, while the rate nationally for 12th graders was 40%. For binge drinking, the rates for 8th, 10th and 12th graders in Utah (vs. the nation) were 5.1% (vs. 6.4%), 8.2% (vs. 14.7%) and 12.2% (vs. 21.6%), respectively. While Utah’s low underage alcohol use rates are definitely a positive sign of the overall wellness of the state’s youth population, there are also data that serve as reminders that underage alcohol use remains an important issue for prevention efforts.

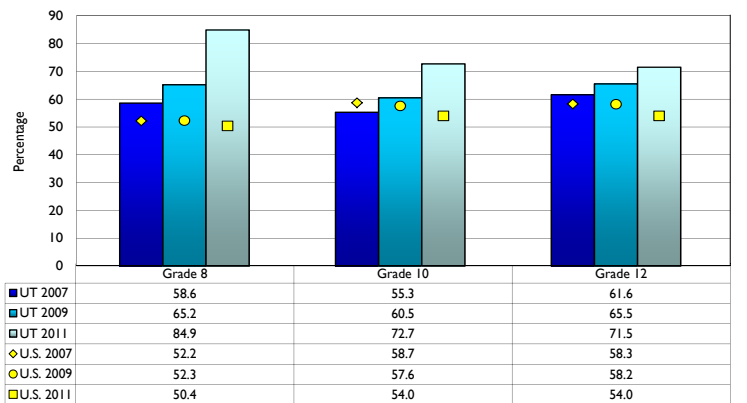
Foremost, alcohol is and has been the most widely used substance by youth in the state. The 30 day alcohol use rate among 6-12th graders (combined) in Utah for 2011 was 8.6%; the rate for the second highest substance used was marijuana at 5.3%, and the rate of cigarette use, which came in third, was 3.8%. With 11.2% of 10th graders and 17% of 12th graders indicating having used alcohol at least once in the past 30 days, this equates to approximately 4,200 10th graders and 5,700 12th graders statewide who had recent alcohol use at the time of the survey<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, while a smaller proportion of Utah’s youth drink alcohol compared to the nation, survey data suggest that Utah youth who do drink alcohol are more likely to engage in binge drinking than their national counterparts. Nationally, about 55% of 12th graders who drank alcohol in the past 30 days also engaged in binge drinking in the past two weeks, for Utah about 72% of 12th graders reporting 30 day alcohol use also indicated binge drinking. A similar pattern of high binge drinking rates among 30 day alcohol users holds for 8th and 10th graders in Utah as well. This is a significant concern; according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, binge drinking is associated with greater risk for negative alcohol related outcomes including: drinking and driving, becoming a victim of violence, and abuse and dependence<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, despite the relatively low drinking rates among Utah youth, the data suggest that a significant number of youth are at risk for negative alcohol related consequences.

Percentage of Youth Indicating Any Alcohol Use in Past 30 Days by Grade, Utah vs. United States (2007-2011)



Source: Student Health and Risk Prevention Survey and Monitoring The Future

Percentage of Youth 30 Day Alcohol Users Who Also Binge Drank in the Past Two Weeks, Utah vs. United States (2007-2011)



Source: Student Health and Risk Prevention Survey and Monitoring The Future

***“Utah youth who drink alcohol are more likely to engage in binge drinking than their national counterparts.”***

## Alcohol Related Consequences

Underage alcohol use is associated with a broad range of negative consequences that can affect individuals, families and society. The potential negative consequences of alcohol use range from more immediate outcomes such as alcohol related motor vehicle crashes to more long term

consequences such as alcohol dependence and alcoholic liver disease. Among youth, early initiation of alcohol use is associated with greater risk for a host of negative outcomes including: delinquency, academic problems, other substance use, sexual risk taking, and violence<sup>4</sup>. Data regarding two alcohol related consequences are highlighted below: alcohol related motor vehicle crashes, and need for alcohol treatment.

(Section continued on following page.)

<sup>1</sup>Utah data from the Utah State Health and Risk Prevention Survey; National data from the Monitoring the Future Survey

<sup>2</sup>Based on 2011 statewide school enrollment data for 10th and 12th graders

<sup>3</sup><http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm>

<sup>4</sup>Ellickson, P.L., Tucker, J.S. & Klein, D.J. (2003). Ten-year prospective study of public health problems associated with early drinking. *Pediatrics*, 111, 949-955.

# Alcohol Related Consequences, Cont.

Overall, alcohol related motor vehicle crashes (ARMVC) involving underage drinkers are a rarer occurrence in Utah compared to nation as a whole. In 2010, for example, 18% of all fatal ARMVC involved drivers under 21 nationally, vs. only 12.2% of fatal ARMVC in Utah. With that said, a significant number of ARMVC in Utah are associated with drivers under the age of 21. In 2010, there were a total of 1,723 alcohol related motor vehicle crashes (ARMVC) on Utah roadways, including 24 crashes that resulted in fatalities and 802 that resulted in injuries. Drivers under age 21 were involved in 199 alcohol related crashes (11.5% of all ARMVC), including three (12.5% of all fatal ARMVC) fatal crashes, and 98 (12.2 of all injury ARMVC) injury crashes<sup>5</sup>.

Research suggests that the younger youth are when they first begin using alcohol the more likely they are to develop alcohol dependence and abuse in later life compared to those who begin drinking at 21<sup>6</sup>. As such, preventing alcohol use among youth or delaying the onset of use is an important goal of prevention efforts that occur throughout the state. Unfortunately, a small percentage of youth do start displaying signs of alcohol dependence before they reach adulthood. Based on survey data, between 4-6% of 10th and 12th graders in Utah are estimated to be in need for alcohol treatment. Prevention and treatment services funded through the Utah Department of Human Services, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health aim to reduce the number of youth who will be negatively impacted by alcohol abuse and dependence, and help those who are experiencing these conditions.

*“Between 4-6% of 10th and 12th graders in Utah are estimated to be in need for alcohol treatment.”*

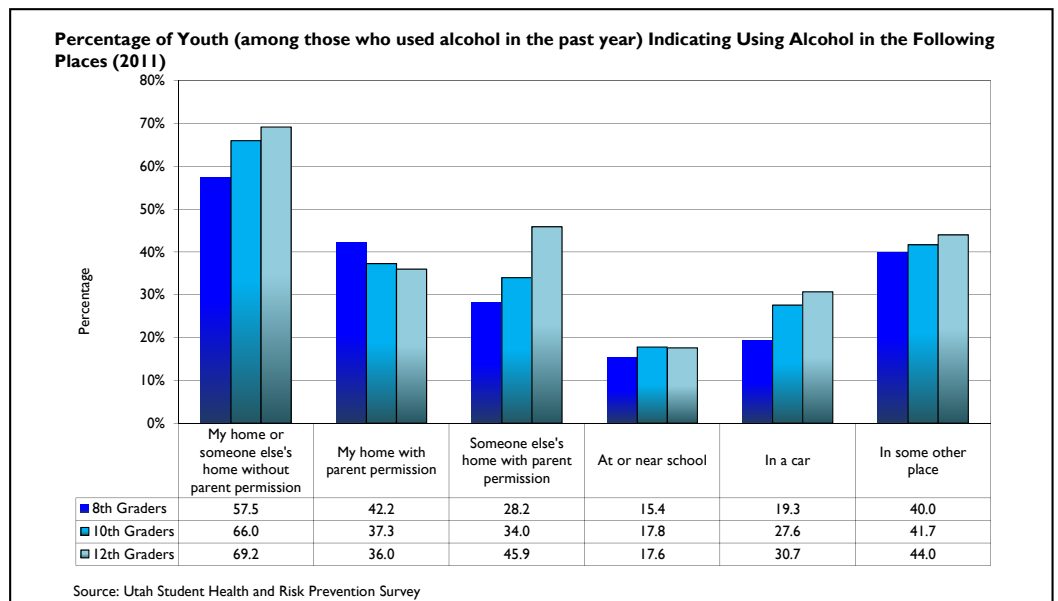
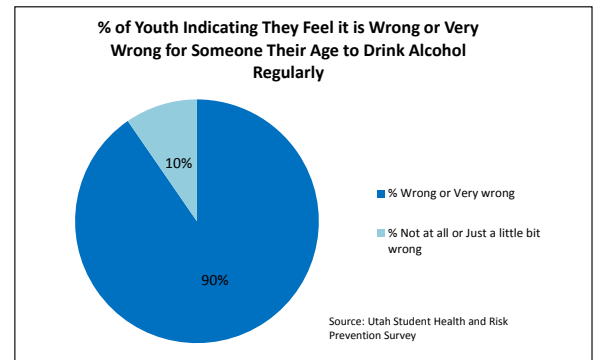
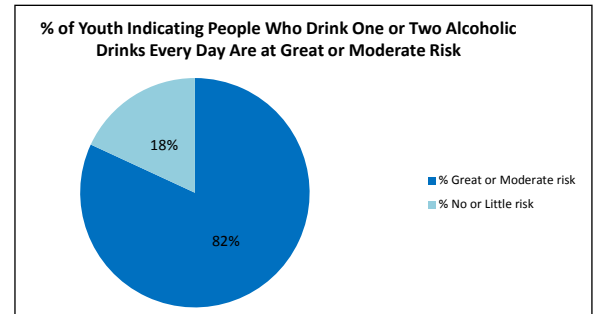
## Causes and Contributing Factors

There are a variety of factors that contribute to alcohol use among underage drinkers, and unfortunately, there is no single magic solution that will prevent all underage drinking. Fortunately, Utah enjoys some of the lowest rates of youth alcohol use in the nation. In looking at some of the causal factors for alcohol use, a strong relationship is apparent between what most youth in Utah believe about the risks and acceptability of alcohol use, and the low use rates in our state.

**Perceived risk and Attitudes toward alcohol use.** Utah youth in grades 6-12 overwhelmingly (82%) indicate that people who drink one or two alcoholic drinks nearly every day are at moderate or great risk of harming themselves. Additionally, nearly all Utah youth (95%) indicate that their parents would feel it is wrong or very wrong for them to drink alcohol regularly, and nine in ten (90%) indicate that they feel it is wrong for someone their age to drink alcohol regularly.

**Places where alcohol is consumed.** While most Utah youth do not consume alcohol, for those who do the salient question is what contributes to their drinking behavior? A look at survey data regarding where youth alcohol users typically drink provides insight regarding the contexts for underage drinking. Overwhelmingly, among those who drink, the most common place to drink is their home or someone else's home, usually without permission (approximately two-thirds of 10th and 12th grader drinkers), but surprisingly, often with parent permission as well (36% of 12th grader drinkers indicated drinking at their home with parent permission; 46% at someone else's home with parent permission). About one-third of 10th and 12th graders indicated drinking in a car, and 40-44% indicated “some other place.”

*“The vast majority of Utah youth believe regular alcohol use is risky and feel it is wrong for people their age to drink.”*



<sup>5</sup>Data from Utah 2010 Crash Summary report, Utah Department of Public Safety  
<sup>6</sup>Grant, B. & Dawson, D.A. (2001). Age at onset of alcohol use and DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: A 12-year follow-up. Journal of Substance Abuse, 13, 493-504.