

Survey: Oregon 8th-graders who drink choose hard liquor, report higher binge-drinking rates

by Bend Weekly News Sources

A new statewide survey of Oregon eighth- and 11th-graders reports disturbing data about the middle-schoolers' underage drinking -- but also some good news for parents.

The Healthy Teens survey conducted annually by the Oregon Department of Human Services found increased rates of binge drinking among eighth-graders, a larger share of eighth-graders saying alcohol is easy to obtain and significant numbers at both grade levels reporting negative consequences of underage drinking.

Contrary to popular belief that beer is the No. 1 alcoholic beverage consumed by teens who drink, eighth-graders reported they consumed, in order, hard liquor, flavored alcoholic beverages and beer. Eleventh-graders put beer second after hard liquor.

More than 13 percent of eighth-graders reported having engaged in binge drinking -- defined as five or more drinks in a row -- during the 30 days prior to responding to the survey, an increase of 15 percent over the 11.5 percent reported last year and 43 percent over the 9.3 percent who reported binge drinking in 2001.

"Everyone who wants to see kids healthy and successful should find some way to act on these numbers," said Bob Nikkel, DHS assistant director for addictions and mental health. "The good news is that parents who act by sending clear, consistent messages about underage drinking are making a difference."

Among eighth-graders who think their parents believe it's "very wrong" to drink beer, wine or liquor, almost 80 percent reported not having consumed alcohol during the prior 30 days. By contrast, among those reporting their parents believe drinking is "not wrong at all," only 30 percent had abstained. Comparable data for Oregon 11th-graders were 66.9 percent and 26.7 percent. The data are consistent with national surveys showing perceptions of parental attitudes affect teens' decisions.

Underage drinking is associated with school failure, unwanted teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, automobile crashes and other negative consequences.

Among other key findings:

• In 2006, the rate of eighth-graders reporting having consumed alcohol during the prior 30 days was 31.9 percent, the highest since 1997 when it was 35.5 percent. The rate among eighth-grade girls was 33.9 percent this year, highest since 1997 when it was 36.6 percent. • The share of eighth-graders who believe one or

two drinks of alcohol daily poses "great risk of harm" fell to 29 percent this year from 39 percent in 2001. ¶ 13.3 percent of eighth-graders reported binge drinking during the prior 30 days, a 43 percent increase from 9.3 percent in 2001. Eleventh-graders' binge-drinking rate fell slightly over the five-year period, to 24.9 percent from 25.3 percent ¶ Among teens who reported having consumed alcohol during the prior 30 days, 35 percent reported stomach upset, 35 percent were unable to remember what happened while drinking and 25 percent later regretted something they did. One in 12 reported missing school or class. ¶ Teens at both grade levels reported it was "easy" or "sort of easy" to obtain alcohol -- 57.2 percent for eighth-graders and 80 percent for 11th-graders -- with parties being placed first at both grade levels, followed by friends under 21 (eighth-graders) and friends over 21 (11th-graders). At both grade levels, about one in 10 reported obtaining alcohol from parents. Although more eighth-graders reported it was "easy" to obtain alcohol, the share of 11th-graders saying so fell by 3 percentage points. ¶ The rate of 11th-graders reporting having consumed alcohol during the prior 30 days was 43.9 percent, down from the 2005 rate of 47.4 percent and lowest since 2003. ¶ The rate of 11th-graders reporting they drink and drive fell to 8.2 percent this year from 13.6 percent in 1997. The decline was greatest for boys, falling to 8.7 percent from 15.7 percent.

All Healthy Teens survey results are available at <http://www.dhs.state.or.us/dhs/ph/chs/youthsurvey/ohtdata.shtml#2006> on the DHS Web site.

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