

## ■ Alcohol consumption among Queensland school students aged 12–17 years, 2005

The Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey is conducted every three years in each state and territory. The survey covers a range of issues including use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs as well as other health behaviours. Queensland has participated in the survey since 1984. This report presents key findings from the alcohol component of the 2005 survey for Queensland.

### ■ Alcohol consumption in 2005

The survey results show that in 2005, 30% of Queensland school students aged 12 to 17 years consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey (Table 1). This is equivalent to approximately 87,500 students. The average number of alcoholic drinks consumed by these students was seven per week.

Drinking trends for Queensland students reflect the national situation, with 29% of all Australian school students aged 12 to 17 years reporting that they consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey.<sup>1</sup>

Recency of drinking increases with age. Just under a quarter of all students aged 12 to 15 years reported drinking in the week preceding the survey, compared with just over half of all 16 to 17 year olds (Table 1). A slightly larger proportion of males reported drinking in the week prior to the survey than females (Table 2). This gender difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 1:** Recent alcohol consumption by age, Queensland students aged 12 to 17 years, 2005

	12–15 yrs	16–17 yrs	Total 12–17 yrs
	%	%	%
Drank in past year	62	89	68
Drank in past month	36	73	45
Drank in the last week (current drinkers)	23	53	30

**Table 2:** Recent alcohol consumption by gender, Queensland students aged 12 to 17 years, 2005

	Males	Females	Total 12–17 yrs
	%	%	%
Drank in past year	70	67	68
Drank in past month	47	44	45
Drank in the last week (current drinkers)	33	28	30

Of all students, 87%, or approximately 253,900, reported drinking some amount of alcohol in their lifetime. The drinking experience for half of all students involved having 'just a few sips' of alcohol or having fewer than 10 drinks, while just over a third reported consuming more than 10 drinks in their lifetime (Table 3).



**Table 3:** Lifetime alcohol consumption by age, Queensland students aged 12 to 17 years, 2005

	12–15 yrs	16–17 yrs	Total 12–17 yrs
	%	%	%
Never drank	16	3	13
Just a few sips	42	14	35
Up to 10 drinks	17	15	16
More than 10 drinks	25	68	35

## Risky alcohol consumption in 2005

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines (2001)<sup>2</sup> provide recommendations for levels of consumption that aim to reduce the probability of long-term or short-term harm occurring as a result of drinking alcohol. Long-term harms include liver damage, cancer and death. Short-term harms include road accidents, assault, injury, alcohol poisoning and death.

The Guidelines recommend that young people up to the age of 18 years should not drink beyond the levels set for low-risk drinking for short-term harm by adults.

Risky alcohol consumption for short-term harm by young people is defined as follows:

**Males** – consuming more than six standard drinks on any one day in the last week

**Females** – consuming more than four standard drinks on any one day in the last week

The survey results show that in 2005, 10% of Queensland students aged 12 to 17 years consumed alcohol at risky levels in the week prior to the survey (Table 4). This is equivalent to approximately 29,200 students. The rate of risky drinking for Australian students aged 12 to 17 years was 9%.<sup>1</sup>

Almost half of current drinkers aged 16 to 17 years drank at risky levels in the week prior to the survey (Table 4). A slightly larger proportion of female current drinkers reported consuming alcohol at risky levels in the week prior to the survey (Table 5). This gender difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 4:** Risky alcohol consumption by age, Queensland students 12 to 17 years, 2005

	12–15 yrs	16–17 yrs	Total 12–17 yrs
	%	%	%
Drank at risky levels in last week (% of all students)	6	25	10
Drank at risky levels in last week (% of current drinkers)	19	47	34

**Table 5:** Risky alcohol consumption by gender, Queensland students 12 to 17 years, 2005

	Males	Females	Total 12–17 yrs
	%	%	%
Drank at risky levels in last week (% of all students)	10	10	10
Drank at risky levels in last week (% of current drinkers)	32	36	34

## Recent changes

Since the previous survey in 2002, the proportion of Queensland school students aged 12 to 17 years reporting they had consumed alcohol in their lifetime, in the month prior or week prior to the survey, has reduced (Table 6). This change reflects the national trend.<sup>1</sup>

For students aged 12 to 17 years, in all but one category (females drinking in their lifetime), the reductions in alcohol consumption are statistically significant.

Overall, during the period 2002 to 2005, the proportion of Queensland students aged 12 to 17 years who reported drinking in the week prior to the survey decreased from 39% in 2002, to 30% in 2005. The largest decline was among males 12 to 15 years reporting that they had consumed alcohol in the last month, falling from 57% in 2002 to 37% in 2005 (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Proportion of Queensland students aged 12-17 years who consumed alcohol in their lifetime, month prior and week prior to survey by age group and gender, 2002-2005

Recency period	Gender	12–15 yrs		16–17 yrs		Total 12–17yrs	
		2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Lifetime	Male	91**	84	95*	98	92**	87
	Female	84	84	95	95	87	87
	Total	87**	84	95	97	89*	87
Month	Male	57**	37	73	76	61**	47
	Female	44**	35	71	70	51**	44
	Total	51**	36	72	73	56**	45
Week	Male	40**	25	56	57	44**	33
	Female	28**	21	50	49	34**	28
	Total	34**	23	53	53	39**	30

\*\* Significantly different from 2005 at  $p < .01$ . \* Significantly different from 2005 at  $p < .05$ .

During the period 2002 to 2005, the proportion of current drinkers consuming alcohol at risky levels in the week prior to the survey increased from 25% to 34% (Table 7). This increase is statistically significant. The increase was more pronounced for male current drinkers aged 12 to 15 years, and female current drinkers aged 16 to 17 years.

The Queensland finding is consistent with the national trend. Risky drinking among current drinkers increased from 27% in 2002 to 31% in 2005 for Australian students.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 7:** Proportion of Queensland students aged 12-17 years who consumed alcohol at risky levels in the week prior to the survey by gender, 2002-2005

	Gender	12–15 yrs		16–17 yrs		Total 12–17yrs	
		2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Drank at risky levels in last week (% of all students)	Male	5	6	24	23	10	10
	Female	5	5	21	26	9	10
	Total	5	6	22	25	10	10
Drank at risky levels in last week (% of current drinkers)	Male	12*	25	43	42	22	32
	Female	19	23	42*	53	28	36
	Total	15*	24	43	47	25*	34

\* Significantly different from 2005 at  $p < .05$ .

## ■ Methodology

In late 2005, 2,091 students from 39 Queensland schools (Government, Independent and Catholic) in metropolitan and regional areas participated in the ASSAD Survey. Questionnaires were eliminated if school year, age or sex data were missing. Questionnaires were also eliminated if the respondent was younger than twelve or older than seventeen years of age. These adjustments resulted in a final sample of 2,028.

During the analysis phase, the data were weighted by age, sex and school type to bring the sample into line with the state distribution of Government, Independent and Catholic school populations.

Only people aged 12 to 17 years who attend school are included in these results. Young people who do not attend school and who engage in risky alcohol consumption are not captured by this survey. It is therefore likely that these results are an underestimate of alcohol consumption among all children aged 12 to 17 years in Queensland.

As this report is based on data from a sample and not a census of the total population, it is necessary to allow for sampling error. Sampling error depends on the size of the sample and the size of the prevalence estimates associated with the sample. The sampling error will be largest when the sample size is small and estimates are around 50%. In 2005, the sampling errors range from a high of  $\pm 9\%$  among 17 year old girls to a low of  $\pm 6\%$  among 16 year old girls.

Finally, as is usually the case with surveys of alcohol, tobacco and other drug consumption, all data from the ASSAD Surveys is based on students' self-report of their own drinking behaviour. It is difficult to know with any certainty whether students have under or overestimated their actual drinking behaviour, nor whether the accuracy of self-report has changed over time. The same questions assessing alcohol consumption behaviour have been used for each survey.

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### References:

1. The Cancer Council Victoria 2006. *Australian Secondary School Students' Use of Alcohol in 2005*. Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.
2. National Health and Medical Research Council 2001. *Australian Alcohol Guidelines: Health Risks and Benefits*. Australian Government, Canberra.

### Notes:

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### Preferred citation:

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