



Australian Capital Territory: Young Risky Drinkers' Most Recent Risky Drinking Session



We asked what a drinking session looked like

At least once a month one in five Australian 14–19 year olds drink alcohol at levels considered to be putting them at risk of injury (1).

The heaviest teenage drinkers tend to disproportionately experience more alcohol related harms while being underrepresented in many health surveys which examine the Australian population as a whole.

The Young Australians Alcohol Reporting System (YAARS), aimed to investigate the drinking occasions that were associated with a risk of harm.

We were interested in the most recent occasion when a teenager drank more than what the national guidelines describe as lower-risk. We asked questions such as how much they drank, where they drank, the types of beverages they had, and about some of the outcomes of this drinking.

We asked about these experiences to determine which factors contribute to, or protect young people from alcohol related harms.

The study focused on 14–19 year-olds classed among the heaviest single-session drinkers

Risky drinking teenagers were surveyed all over Australia

In 2016 and 2017 we conducted over 3,400 face-to-face interviews and online surveys with young people aged 14–19. This bulletin presents the findings from our 278 ACT based teenagers (74 face-to-face interviews and 204 online surveys).

The participants represented the riskiest drinking 20–25% of their age-bracket (most were consuming 5+ standard drinks at least twice a month).

Participants were recruited through social media advertising, peer-referral, and posters at educational facilities and services frequented by young people.

This study is not representative of all 14–19 year old drinkers. Our sample represents a minority subset who engage in risky alcohol consumption. Please refer to our other publications for further information on the project's methods, and comparisons with age-matched groups recruited using representative sampling techniques (2).

Where did they drink?

At the last drinking session young people reported drinking at:

- A friend's home (47%)
- Nightclub (30%)
- Their own home (27%)
- A bar or pub (19%)
- Public or other place (13%).¹

Young risky drinkers described the most recent occasion when they drank beyond national guideline quantities*

* These quantities were different for each age and gender group. E.g. it was 5+ standard drinks for those aged 16-17 years.

- Three-quarters (75%) drank in at least one non-licensed location such as a home, car, or park, during the drinking session.

When did they drink?

The last drinking session was most often started on a weekend evening:

- More than half (56%) described this drinking session as happening within the last week, and 72% reported it happening within the last fortnight.
- Just over half of the drinking sessions started on Fridays (22%) and Saturdays (33%), but Thursdays were also a common night for risky drinking (24%).
- The first drink of the session was usually in the early evening (5pm to 8.30pm) and the last drink in the early morning (midnight to 3.30am).
- The average drinking session was around 6 hours and 40 minutes (6.7 hours).

Popular beverage types

The most popular drink types were spirits consumed straight or mixed (68%), beer (39%) and pre-mixed drinks, also known as ready-to-drink or 'alcopops' (38%). Females were more likely than males to report drinking wine. Males were more likely than females to report drinking beer.

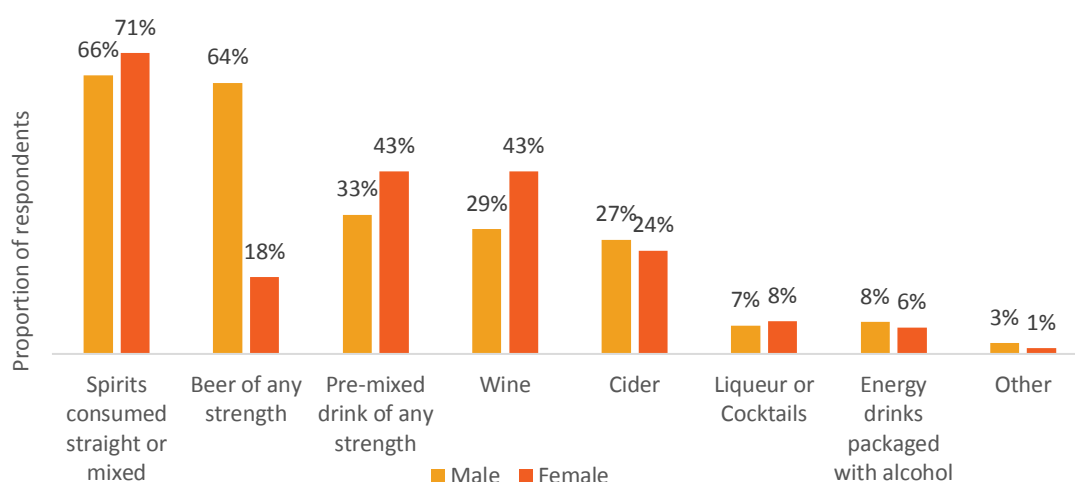


Figure 1. Drink types consumed at the last risky drinking session

¹ People could drink in more than one location, so the total for all locations adds up to more than 100%.

More than half pre-drunk

'Pre-drinking', also known as having 'pre's' or 'pre-loading', is consuming alcohol before you 'go out'. For example, you and your friends might drink alcohol at home before going out to a nightclub or a house party where there are more people. Males and females didn't differ in the percentage who reported pre-drinking. However, 18-19 year-olds were more likely to report pre-drinking than younger teenagers.

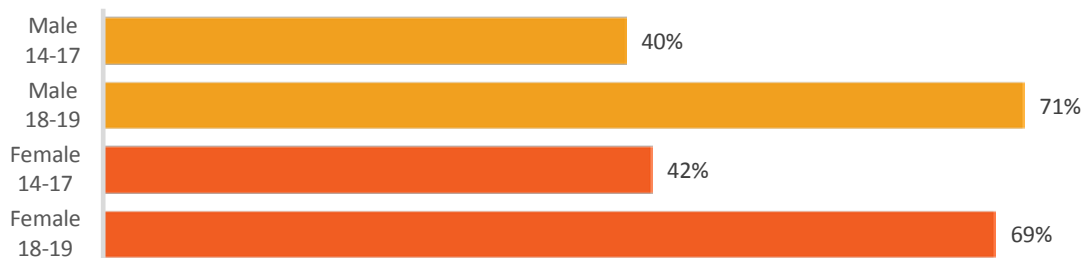


Figure 2. Proportion of participants who had pre-drunk on their last risky drinking session

How much did they drink?

On average at the last session males drank more than females, and 18-19 year olds drank more than 14-17 year olds.

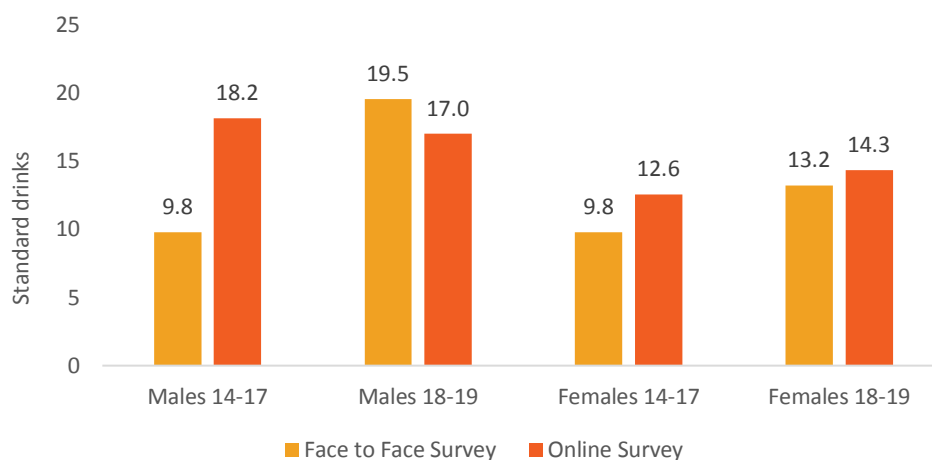


Figure 3. Average alcohol use at the last risky drinking session by age, gender and survey administration modality

Alcohol-related outcomes from this drinking session

Harms reported to have occurred as a result of this drinking session included:

- Saying or doing embarrassing things (40%)
- Hangover (37%)
- Having less energy or feeling tired because of my drinking (29%)
- Feeling very sick to my stomach or thrown up after drinking (24%)
- Needing larger amounts of alcohol to feel any effect, or finding I could no longer get high or drunk on the amount that used to get me high or drunk (24%)
- Not being able to remember large stretches of time while drinking heavily (21%)

- Doing impulsive things I regretted later (21%)
- Finding it difficult to limit how much I drink (20%)
- Been injured due to my drinking (including cuts & bruises; 15%).

How did they try to keep safe?

Despite drinking at risky levels, some participants also used protective strategies that can limit alcohol-related harms (3). The safety strategies that are most likely to work involve people limiting the amount of alcohol they drink. The most commonly used protective strategies among the young people in the last 12 months were: knowing where your drink has been at all times (76%); making sure you go home with a friend (66%); and using a designated driver (57%). Most young people did not use strategies to stop or limit drinking.

Table 1. Safety strategies 'always' or 'usually' engaged in while drinking in the past 12 months

	Male	Female
Determine not to exceed a set number of drinks	14%	14%
Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks	21%	25%
Have a friend let you know when you have had enough to drink	21%	23%
Leave the bar or party at a predetermined time	17%	22%
Stop drinking at a predetermined time	18%	9%
Drink water while drinking alcohol	42%	45%
Put extra ice in your drink	14%	9%
Avoid drinking games	14%	11%
Drink shots of spirits (risk behaviour)	54%	67%
Avoid mixing different types of alcohol	16%	10%
Drink slowly, rather than gulp or scull	21%	21%
Avoided trying to "keep up" or out-drink others	28%	35%
Use a designated driver	51%	62%
Made sure that you go home with a friend	57%	73%
Know where your drink has been at all times	75%	77%
N	102	130

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References (1) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016 key findings. 2017. (2) Lam T, Lenton S, Ogeil R, Burns L, Aiken A, Chikritzhs T, Gilmore W, Lloyd B, Wilson J, Lubman D, Mattick R, Allsop S. Most recent risky drinking session with Australian teenagers. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health. 2017;41(1). (3) Martens MP, Ferrier AG, Cimini M. Do Protective Behavioral Strategies Mediate the Relationship Between Drinking Motives and Alcohol Use in College Students? Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs. 2007;68(1).