

DRUG WAR FACTS

Alcohol

1. "Slightly more than half of Americans aged 12 or older reported being current drinkers of alcohol in the 2005 survey (51.8 percent). This translates to an estimated 126 million people, which is higher than the 2004 estimate of 121 million people (50.3 percent).
"More than one fifth (22.7 percent) of persons aged 12 or older participated in binge drinking at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey in 2005. This translates to about 55 million people, comparable with the estimates reported since 2002.
"In 2005, heavy drinking was reported by 6.6 percent of the population aged 12 or older, or 16 million people. This percentage is similar to the rates of heavy drinking in 2002 (6.7 percent), 2003 (6.8 percent), and 2004 (6.9 percent)."
These categories are defined thus:
"Current (past month) use - At least one drink in the past 30 days (includes binge and heavy use).
"Binge use - Five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days (includes heavy use).
"Heavy use - Five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days."

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, US Department of Health and Human Services, Results from the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings (Rockville, MD: Office of Applied Studies, Sept. 2006), p. 27.

2. "When an alcoholic beverage is consumed, approximately 20% of the alcohol is absorbed in the stomach and 80% is absorbed in the small intestine (Freudenrich, 2001). After absorption, alcohol enters the bloodstream and dissolves in the water of the blood where it is quickly distributed to body tissues. When alcohol reaches the brain, it affects the cerebral cortex first, followed by the limbic system (hippocampus and septal area), cerebellum, hypothalamus, pituitary gland, and lastly, the medulla, or brain stem. Some of these regions are similar to those affected by cannabis, but alcohol also affects sexual arousal/function and increases urinary output. When BAC is near toxic levels, lower order brain regions are affected, which is often followed by sleepiness, lack of consciousness, coma, or death."

Source: Laberge, Jason C., Nicholas J. Ward, "Research Note: Cannabis and Driving -- Research Needs and Issues for Transportation Policy," Journal of Drug Issues, Dec. 2004, pp. 973.

3. On an average day in 1996, an estimated 5.3 million convicted offenders were under the supervision of criminal justice authorities. Nearly 40% of these offenders, about 2 million, had been using alcohol at the time of the offense for which they were convicted.

Source: Greenfield, Lawrence A., US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, April, 1998), p. 20.

4. About 6 in 10 convicted jail inmates said that they had been drinking on a regular basis during the year before the offense for which they were serving time. Nearly 2 out of 3 of these inmates, regardless of whether they drank daily or less often, reported having previously been in a treatment program for an alcohol dependency problem.

Source: Greenfield, Lawrence A., US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, April, 1998), p. 27.

5. About a quarter of the women on probation nationwide had been drinking at the time of their offense compared to more than 40% of male probationers (figure 30). For those convicted of public-order crimes, nearly two-thirds of women and three-quarters of men had been drinking at the time of the offense.

Source: Greenfield, Lawrence A., US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, April, 1998), p. 24.

6. For more than 4 in 10 convicted murderers being held either in jail or in State prison, alcohol use is reported to have been a factor in the crime. Nearly half of those convicted of assault and sentenced to probation had been drinking when the offense occurred.

Source: Greenfield, Lawrence A., US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, April, 1998), p. 21.

7. According to a literature review of the effects of alcohol on driving, "As with cannabis, alcohol use increased variability in lane position and headway (Casswell, 1979; Ramaekers et al., 2000; Smiley et al., 1981; Stein et al., 1983) but caused faster speeds (Casswell, 1977; Krueger & Vollrath, 2000; Peck et al., 1986; Smiley et al., 1987; Stein et al., 1983). Some studies also showed that alcohol use alone and in combination with cannabis affected visual search behavior (Lamers & Ramaekers, 2001; Moskowitz, Ziedman, & Sharma, 1976). Alcohol consumption combined with cannabis use also worsened driver performance relative to use of either substance alone. Lane position and headway variability were more exaggerated (Attwood et al., 1981; Ramaekers et al., 2000; Robbe, 1998) and speeds were faster (Peck et al., 1986).

"Both simulator and road studies showed that relative to alcohol use alone, participants who used cannabis alone or in combination with alcohol were more aware of their intoxication. Robbe (1998) found that participants who consumed 100 g/kg of cannabis rated their performance worse and the amount of effort required greater compared to those who consumed alcohol (0.05 BAC). Ramaekers et al. (2000) showed that cannabis use alone and in combination with alcohol consumption increased self-ratings of intoxication and decreased self-ratings of performance. Lamers and Ramaekers (2001) found that cannabis use alone (100 g/kg) and in combination with alcohol consumption resulted in lower ratings of alertness, greater perceptions of effort, and worse ratings of performance."

Source: Laberge, Jason C., Nicholas J. Ward, "Research Note: Cannabis and Driving -- Research Needs and Issues for Transportation Policy," Journal of Drug Issues, Dec. 2004, pp. 978.

8. "When compared to alcohol, cannabis is detected far less often in accident-involved drivers. Drummer et al. (2003) cited several studies and found that alcohol was detected in 12.5% to 79% of drivers involved in accidents. With regard to crash risk, a large study conducted by Borkenstein, Crowther, Shumate, Zeil and Zylman (1964) compared BAC in approximately 6,000 accident-involved drivers and 7,600 nonaccident controls. They determined the crash risk for each BAC by comparing the number of accident-involved drivers with detected levels of alcohol at each BAC to the number of nonaccident control drivers with the same BAC. They found that crash risk increased sharply as BAC increased. More specifically, at a BAC of 0.10, drivers were approximately five times more likely to be involved in an accident.

"Similar crash risk results were obtained when data for culpable drivers were evaluated. Drummer (1995) found that drivers with detected levels of alcohol were 7.6 times more likely to be culpable. Longo et al. (2000) showed that drivers who tested positive for alcohol were 8.0 times more culpable, and alcohol consumption in combination with cannabis use produced an odds ratio of 5.4. Similar results were also noted by Swann (2000) and Drummer et al. (2003)."

Source: Laberge, Jason C., Nicholas J. Ward, "Research Note: Cannabis and Driving -- Research Needs and Issues for Transportation Policy," Journal of Drug Issues, Dec. 2004, pp. 981.

9. "In 2002 and 2003, an estimated 88.2 percent of persons aged 21 or older (175.6 million) were lifetime alcohol users, whereas an estimated 11.8 percent (23.5 million) were lifetime nondrinkers. Over half of lifetime alcohol users (52.7 percent) had used one or more illicit drugs at some time in their life, compared to 8.0 percent of lifetime nondrinkers. Among persons who had used an illicit drug in their lifetime, the average age at first illicit drug use was 19 years for lifetime alcohol users, versus 23 years

for lifetime nondrinkers."

Source: "The NSDUH Report: Illicit Drug Use Among Lifetime Nondrinkers and Lifetime Alcohol Users," Office of Applied Programs, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, US Dept. of Health and Human Services, June 14, 2005, p. 2.

10. "Lifetime alcohol users aged 21 or older had a significantly higher rate of past year illicit drug use (13.7 percent) compared with lifetime nondrinkers (2.7 percent). In addition, lifetime alcohol users had significantly higher rates of past year use across all illicit drug categories, with the exception of inhalants (Table 1). Nonmedical use of pain relievers was the illicit drug used most often by lifetime nondrinkers, whereas lifetime alcohol users reported using marijuana most frequently."

Source: "The NSDUH Report: Illicit Drug Use Among Lifetime Nondrinkers and Lifetime Alcohol Users," Office of Applied Programs, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, US Dept. of Health and Human Services, June 14, 2005, p. 2.

For a more complete perspective, also read related Drug War Facts sections on Comparative Dangers of Drugs, Crack, Drug Use Estimates, Gateway Theory, Marijuana, The Netherlands, Prison, Race and Prison, and Treatment.

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