

Study Reveals More Teens Allowed to Drink at Home during Quarantine

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16% of parents in a recent study allowed their teens to drink during quarantine.

A recent study by researchers at Utah State University and the University of Notre Dame reveals that 1 out of 6 surveyed parents allowed their teenaged children to drink alcohol during quarantine.

Stay-at-home orders enacted in the spring of 2020 due to COVID-19 dramatically changed daily life and created significant challenges for families. With so many rapid adjustments to work and learning, many parents struggled to manage the emotional, interpersonal, and educational needs of their families while facing concerns about employment, finances, and health. This study aimed to examine the number of U.S. parents who allowed adolescents to drink alcohol at home in light of these factors, especially those who had not previously done so.

Shawn Whiteman, professor in the Human Development and Family Studies department of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, is the principal investigator of the study, which also includes lead author Dr. Jennifer Maggs from Pennsylvania State University, Dr. Sarah Mustillo from the University of Notre Dame, Dr. Brian Kelley at Purdue University, and USU graduate student Jenna Cassinat.

The study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, involved 456 parents with two children around 2.5 years apart from Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Researchers hypothesized that the number of parents allowing adolescent drinking would increase during the shutdown due to several factors, such as an

increase in adults drinking due to increased stress and only having the option to drink in the home, leading to more opportunity to share alcohol with youth.



Dr. Shawn Whiteman,

HDFS

While all surveyed parents reported that they did not allow their children to drink prior to quarantine, one in six reported allowing one or more of their teens to have alcohol during the lockdown. Of the 16 percent who did allow at least one child to drink at home, 46 percent allowed both children to drink, 24 percent allowed only the older sibling, and 4 percent allowed only the younger sibling.

"We were surprised that many younger siblings were permitted to drink along with their older brothers and sisters," says Dr. Whiteman. "Despite the challenges, parents may wish to be careful, because earlier exposure to alcohol during adolescence is associated with a range of long-term problems."

Although many states have laws that allow minors to drink with parental permission, and while parents may believe that drinking in the home is less risky than drinking outside of it, parent alcohol permissiveness and early drinking are risk factors for disorders such as binge drinking. Dr. Maggs says these risks far outweigh the short-term benefits.

"We know that adolescent drinking is a neurotoxin and a risk factor for faster acceleration to heavy drinking," she says. "Parents everywhere are struggling to manage

overwhelming demands during the pandemic, but it would be much better to find other privileges or treats.”

The authors recommend that pediatricians continue to follow alcohol screening guidelines for adolescents and that doctors support parents to maintain alcohol-free childhoods.

This research has been featured by [The University of Notre Dame](#) and is circulating amongst the research community on [Twitter](#).