Extreme binge drinking: How common is it among high school seniors?

ANN ARBOR --- A University of Michigan study published online in JAMA Pediatrics finds that ten percent of high school seniors have engaged in extreme binge drinking, drinking ten or more alcoholic drinks in a single sitting.

The study is based on data from a nationally representative sample of more than 16,000 high school seniors, surveyed between 2005 and 2011 as part of the annual Monitoring the Future Study conducted by the U-M Institute for Social Research (ISR).

“More than one in ten high school seniors (10.5 percent) had 10 or more drinks in a row and more than one in 20 (5.6 percent) had 15 or more drinks in a row at least once in the last two weeks,” said developmental psychologist Megan Patrick, lead author of the study.

The study is important because it provides insight into seemingly conflicting trends: that reported levels of binge drinking – traditionally defined as having five or more drinks in a row – have been declining among adolescents but that at the same time, medical emergencies involving teen alcohol use have been rising.

“For example, 15.1 percent of males reported drinking 10 or more drinks in a single setting within a two-week period, compared to 5.3 percent of females.”
“Adolescent alcohol consumption is an important public health issue,” said Patrick. “We hope that this study is helpful in drawing attention to the prevalence of extreme binge drinking among our nation’s high school seniors.”

Co-authors of the study were John Schulenberg, Meghan Martz, Patrick O’Malley and Lloyd Johnston at the U-M and Jennifer Maggs at Pennsylvania State University.

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