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## Special points of interest:

- 97% of 17 year olds have consumed alcohol.
- Over 70% of 17 year olds have binge drank in the past 30 days.
- The percentage of youth drinking and driving increases dramatically aft age 17.
- 73.4% of youth reported that it would be easy or very easy to get alcohol if they wanted it.

## Fact Sheet #7 Alcohol Use

### Alcohol Use

Youth tend to engage in risk taking involving the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other substances “Generally, continued excessive use of alcohol can damage the liver and eventually lead to cirrhosis of the liver. Alcohol is also a risk factor for the development of some cancers.” (Health Canada 1999).

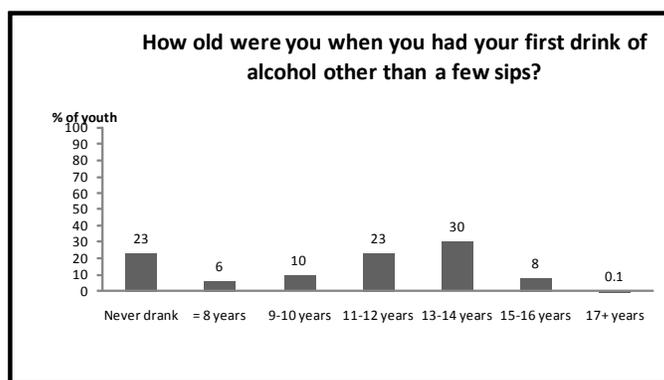
Most Canadian youth drink alcohol. In 2002/03, 19% of youth aged 12 to 14 and 72% of those aged 15 to 19 reported they drank alcohol. Drinking in the youngest group has declined since 1994/95 (Canadian Council on Social Development 2006).

The majority of teenagers drink alcohol one to three times per month. In their teens and early 20s, young men tend to drink more frequently than women. The likelihood of driving in a vehi-

cle with someone who has been drinking also increases with age. In 2002/03, 6% of youth aged 12 to 14 said they had been in such a situation, up from 4% in 1996/97. Among older teens (15 to 19 years), the proportion grew from 15% to 18% (Canadian Council on Social Development 2006)

Among the rural youth represented in this study, rates of alcohol consumption on all measures are higher than the national averages. 34% of students report binge drinking which is more than 5 drinks in a 2 hour period. Male youth start drinking earlier, drink more often and are more likely to drink and drive than female youth.

### Over 75% of students across all age groups have tried alcohol



The table above highlights that alcohol use is prevalent among rural youth and that students begin drinking at a young age. Over 75% of students across all age groups have had their first drink of alcohol (other than a few sips).

There is a sharp increase in the number of students trying alcohol between 11 and 14 years of age. The table indicates that over 50% of youth had their first drink

between these years.

Students were also asked to indicate roughly how many drinks they have had in their life. What was interesting to note is that despite a legal drinking age of 19, 97% of 17 year olds have had at least one drink of alcohol in their lives. The age of students and the amount of alcohol they have had in their lives is significantly related ( $p < 0.01$ ). As youth get older they are drinking more alcohol.

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## Higher rates of alcohol consumption linked to risky behaviors

When controlled for gender and age, the number of days youth reported drinking in the past month was significantly related to a number of personal safety variables including:

- The number of times the youth was in a physical fight. The relationship however was not significant for students 12 years old or younger and 14 years of age.
- Increased levels of smoking. Higher rates of alcohol use in the month were also correlated with higher rates of smoking in the month.
- Increased marijuana use. The relationship between marijuana use and alcohol consumption was significant for students 15 years old and over.

- Increased sexual activity. Higher rates of alcohol consumption are correlated with increased sexual encounters and more sexual partners among students.

*“Like I think it comes down to there’s nothing more that you can do around here cause we don’t have like a youth center, we don’t have a movie theatre or anything like the city kids have advantage of. We just have our bars and bushes and our parties, that’s all we have out here.” - Youth Focus Group Participant*

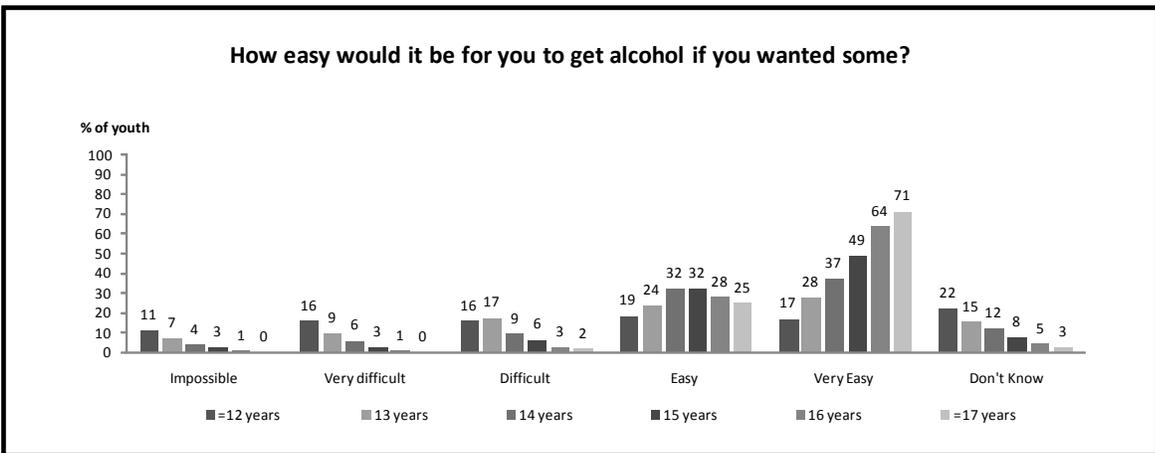
## Alcohol easier to get than cigarettes

It is important to recognize that the legal drinking age in Saskatchewan is 19 years of age, however, this age limit appears to have little impact on the ability of youth to obtain alcohol. Over all age groups, 73.4% of youth reported that it would be

easy or very easy to get alcohol if they wanted it. This has a strong relationship to age with older youth having fewer barriers to obtaining alcohol and 95% of 17 year olds felt it would be easy or very easy to get alcohol.

Interestingly, students reported it was easier to get alcohol than it was to get cigarettes.

*“Drinking and partying become the social activities of the whole community. What alternative do we provide for youth?”- Key Informant*



## 3/4 of youth think alcohol use is a problem in their school

Overall, close to half of the students in the survey saw alcohol use to be a small problem in their schools (47.8%). Only about 22% thought that alcohol use was not a problem and almost 30% thought it was a big problem in their schools.

Perception of alcohol use was significantly related to the age of students in the survey. Students in grades 7 and 8 were most

likely to report that alcohol use was not a problem at all in their school.

However, students in the early years of high school (Grades 9 and 10) were more likely to think alcohol use was a problem compared to older students. This suggests that as students get older, they get more involved in consuming alcohol and as a result, downplay it as a problem.

*“There are more youth participating in underage drinking than any other substances.”- Key Informant*

## 34% of students reported binge drinking

Conventionally, binge drinking is defined as more than 5 drinks within a couple of hours for males, and 4 or more drinks for females. Heavy binge drinking is defined as more than 2 binge drinking episodes within a two week period.

Close to 34% of students across all age groups said they had binge drank on at least one day in the past month. While the largest number of binge drinking students did so on one day of the month, over 5% of students binge drank on 6 or more days in the past month.

Binge drinking is strongly related to age. Over 23% of 14 year



olds reported one occasion of binge drinking in the past 30 days, increasing to over 70% of 17 year olds.

There is no difference between

male and female students when it comes to binge drinking. While male students were slightly more likely to have binge drank over the past month, the difference is not significant.

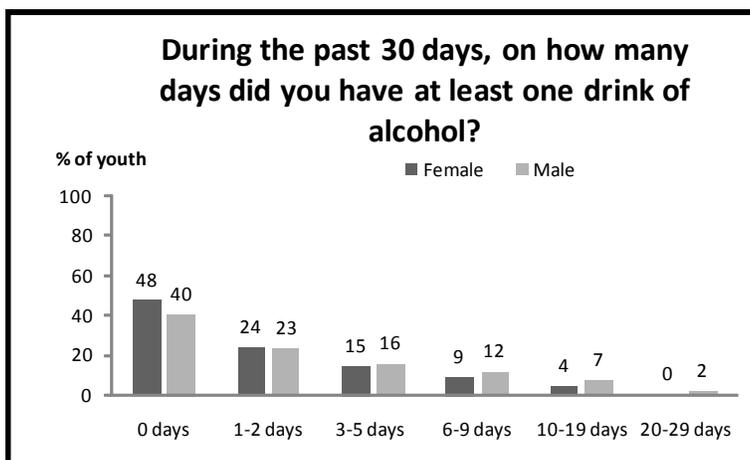
*“Five drinks is not a lot. If you go to a party in \*\*\*\* that’s kind of embarrassing. Maybe not for a girl, but for a guy. If you don’t take a case [of beer] it’s like...”- Youth Focus Group Participant*

## Male youth start drinking younger, drink more often and are more likely to drink and drive

Males and females are significantly different when different aspects of alcohol use are compared between the two sexes. The table shows that females were drinking on fewer days than males in the previous month. This is a significant difference, for instance, while only 0.4% of females had one drink on at least 20 days of the month, 2% of males reported the same amount.

The age at which male and female students begin to drink alcohol is also significantly different between the sexes. Male students tend to begin drinking alcohol at a younger age than female students.

Gender also plays a role in the likelihood of drinking and driving. Male students are close to twice as likely to be drinking and driving more than two times in the past 30 days as compared to female students.



Males and females did not differ on how easy it was for them to get alcohol when they wanted some, but they did differ on how much of a problem they thought it was in their schools.

Males were more likely to say that they thought alcohol use was not a problem at all in their schools while females were more likely to report alcohol use as a big problem in their school.

*“Well that’s like it’s always the guys taking the girls around and stuff. I don’t know many girls who drive to parties, they usually ask the guys to...cause the guys are more willing and the guys are more allowed to.”- Youth Focus Group Participant*

*“I think it is ironic how some people are all against marijuana, like I have heard about people, I know they go out and party and get drunk out of their minds and then they hate people who use marijuana because it’s a drug. But alcohol is a drug too and how can you not make that connection, like they are doing just as bad to themselves as they would have if they would be using marijuana.”- Youth Focus Group Participant*

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**Saskatchewan Rural Youth Healthy Lifestyles and Risk Behaviour Study**

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Views, conclusions, and recommendations in this fact sheet do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the organizations or agencies sponsoring or contributing to the research in various ways.



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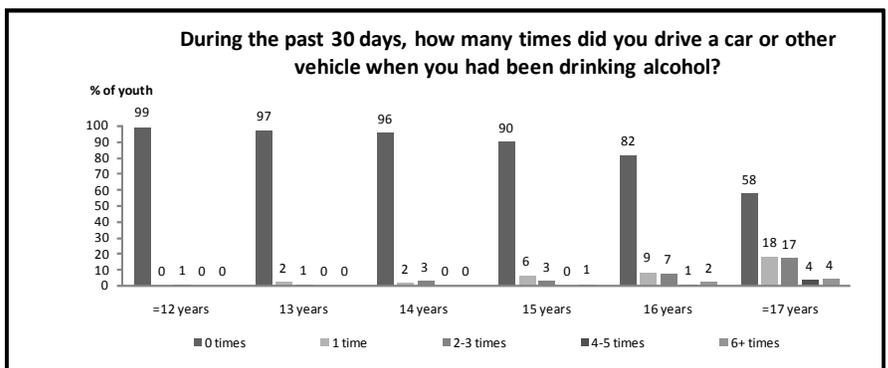
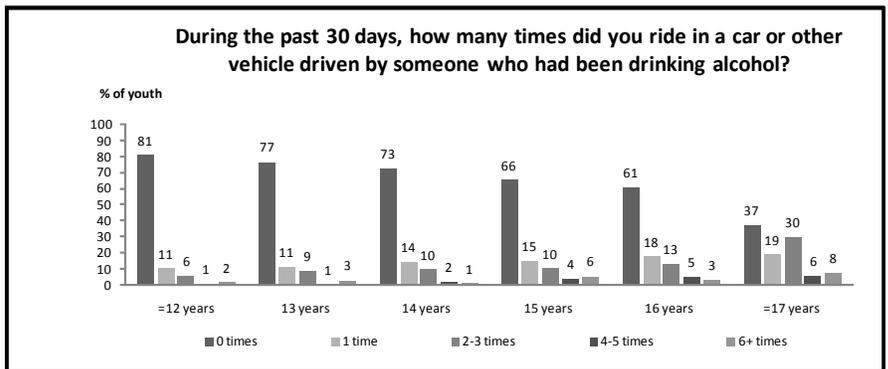
**Drinking and Driving**

At age 16, 81.5% of 16 year olds reported not driving while drinking during the past 30 days, yet the number of students not drinking and driving dramatically decreases to only 57.5% of students 17 years or older. This is interesting given that the legal driving age in Saskatchewan is 16. These numbers may in part be due to provincial legislation that has increased restrictions and penalties for new drivers.

What is also surprising is the number of students who admitted to driving after drinking, below the legal driving age. For example, just over 10% of 15 year old students reported driving after drinking at least once in the past 30 days.

More than 1/3 (35.4%) of all students had ridden with a drinking driver over the past 30 days. The percentage of students driving with drinking drivers steadily increases across the age groups, but dramatically increases between 16 years old and 17 years and older. While approximately 39% of 16 year olds drove with a driver who had been drinking in the previous month, this number increases to 63% of students 17 years old and over.

In 2004, less than 12% of drivers under age 20 said they had driven in the last 30 days after



consuming alcohol, compared to 22% of those aged 19 to 24 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). These statistics are very different from the reported behaviours of rural youth in this study. The higher percentages of drinking and driving may represent

the limited transportation options in rural communities as well as more liberal rural attitudes toward youth drinking.