



Government of Western Australia
Mental Health Commission

*We're working for
Western Australia.*

Alcohol Trends in Western Australia: Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug Survey

How is the data collected?

Every three years, school students in Western Australia are surveyed to find out about their drug use in the Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug Survey.

They are asked about alcohol, tobacco, other illicit and licit drug use, how much they use, how they use and their attitudes to alcohol and other drug use.

The survey has been running since 1984, with additional drug-related questions added in 1996.

The most recent survey included 3,361 young people aged from 12 to 17 years from 46 randomly selected government, Catholic and independent schools across the State.

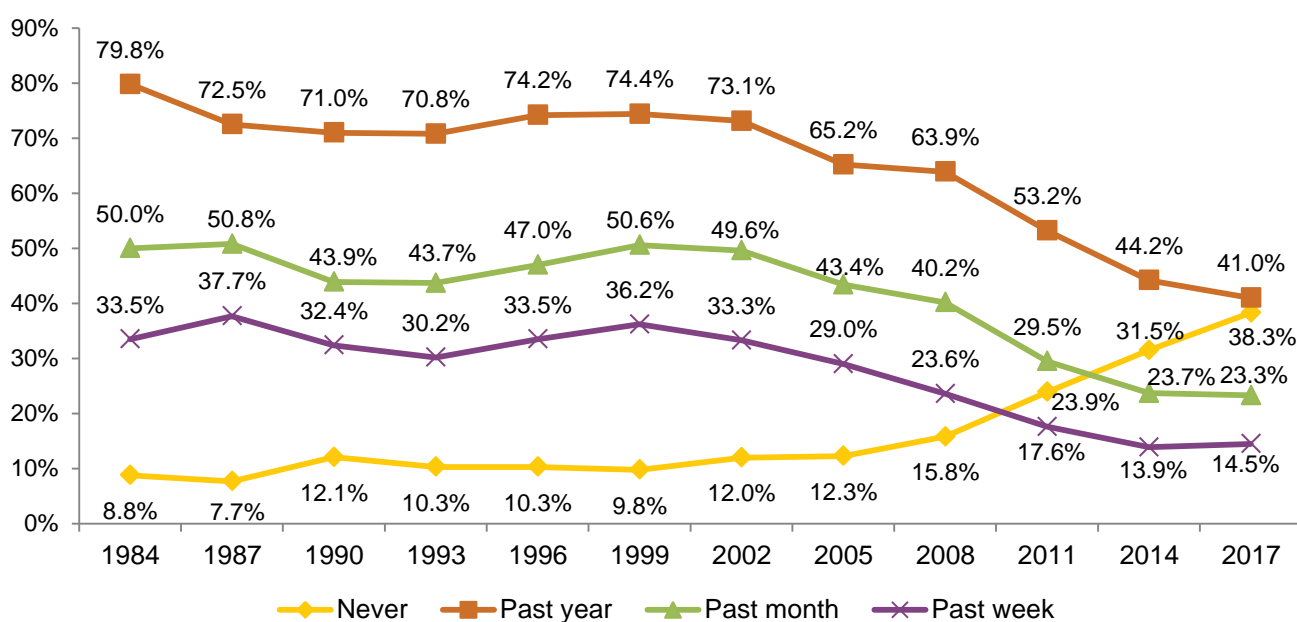
More students choosing not to drink

Students were asked if they had consumed alcohol and how recently (see Figure 1).

Between 1984 and 2017, there have been significant declines in the estimated proportion of students drinking in the past year (79.8% to 41.0%), in the past month (50.0% to 23.3%) and in the past week (33.5% to 14.5%).

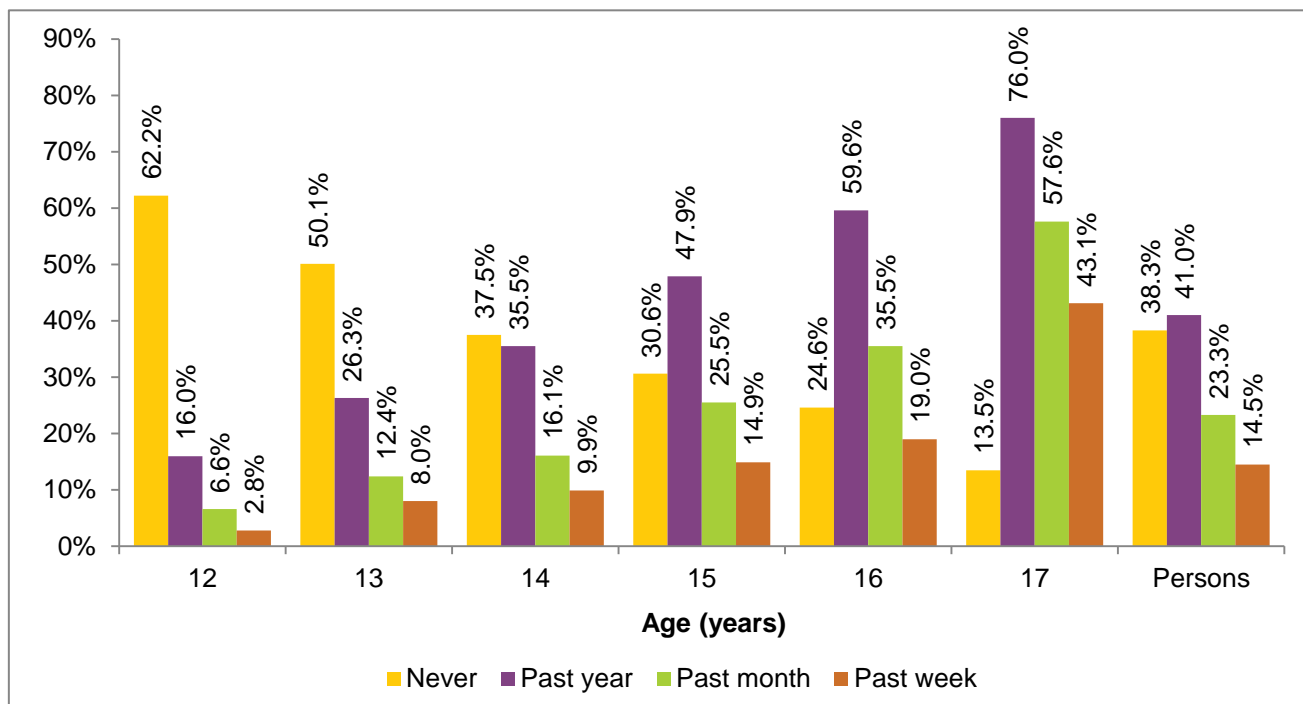
Over this same period, the proportion of students estimated to have never consumed alcohol has increased from 8.8% to 38.3%. The proportion in 2017 is approximately triple that of 2005 (12.3%).

Figure 1. Prevalence and recency of alcohol use for students aged 12 to 17 years, 1984 to 2017.



*Please note that 1984 – 2014 figures published in this bulletin may be slightly different to previous years' bulletins as the data has been re-analysed to exclude surveys that are incomplete or have incorrect answers.

Figure 2. Prevalence and recency of alcohol use for students by age, 2017.



Alcohol use increases with age

As Figure 2 shows, the estimated proportion of students who report never drinking steadily decreased with increasing age (from 62.2% of 12 year olds down to 13.5% of 17 year olds).

In contrast, the prevalence of drinking increased with age across each recency period.

For all male students (aged 12 to 17 years), an estimated 39.2% have never consumed alcohol, 39.1% drank in the past year, 20.5% in the past month and 13.2% in the past week.

For all female students, an estimated 37.3% have never consumed alcohol, 43.0% drank in the past year, 26.2% in the past month and 15.8% in past last week.

Risky drinking guidelines

According to the 2009 National Health and Medical Research Council alcohol consumption guidelines, not drinking alcohol is the safest option for children and young people under 18 years of age.

This is particularly so for those under 15 years of age.

For adults, drinking at risk of single occasion harm (e.g. injury) is defined as having more than four standard drinks on any one day.

Defining Risky Drinking for Students

Single occasion is the most common type of risky drinking for young people, as most students do not drink regularly.

Only those who had used alcohol in the last week were asked about quantity consumed.

Therefore, risky drinking for other periods such as past month or year cannot be calculated.

Note that single occasion risk in the following analysis is defined using adult guidelines, though not drinking is the safest option for young people.

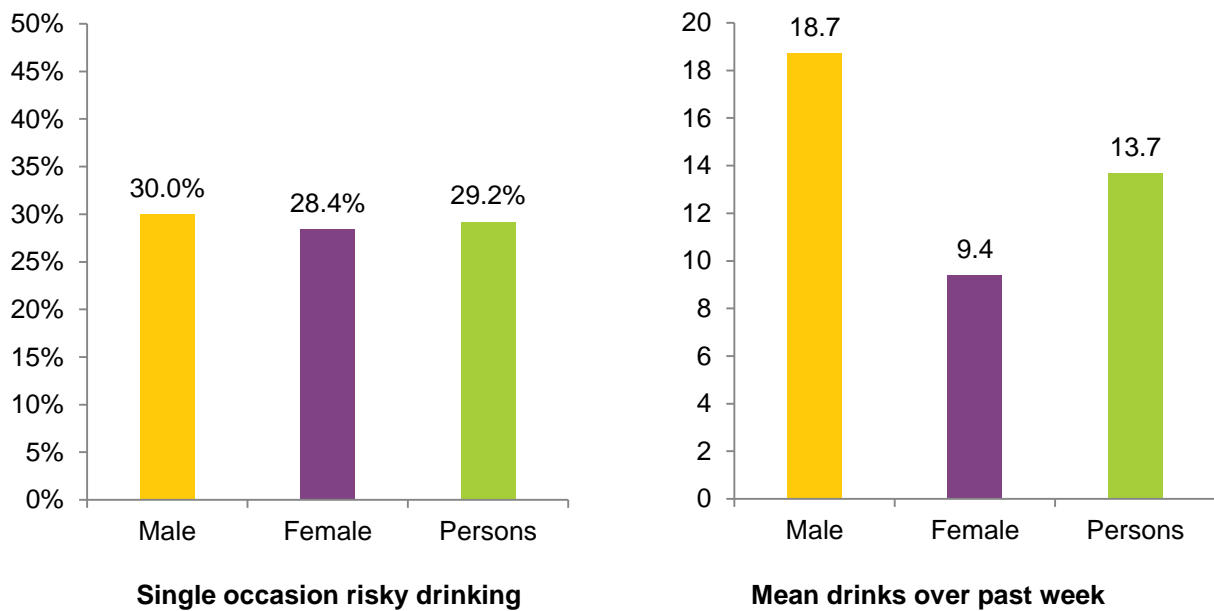
Risky drinking in 2017

Of those students who drank in the past week (14.5%), approximately three in ten (29.2%) drank at levels associated with single occasion harm (see Figure 3).

For boys who drank in the past week (13.2%), three in ten (30.0%) drank at a risky level. Girls were similar – of those who drank in the past week (15.8%) approximately three in ten (28.4%) drank at risky levels.

For students who drank at single occasion risk during the past week, boys reported drinking more than girls during this period (18.7 drinks vs. 9.4 drinks, respectively).

Figure 3. Prevalence of single occasion risky drinking and mean drinks over the past week for those who drank at single occasion risk by gender, 12 to 17 years, 2017.

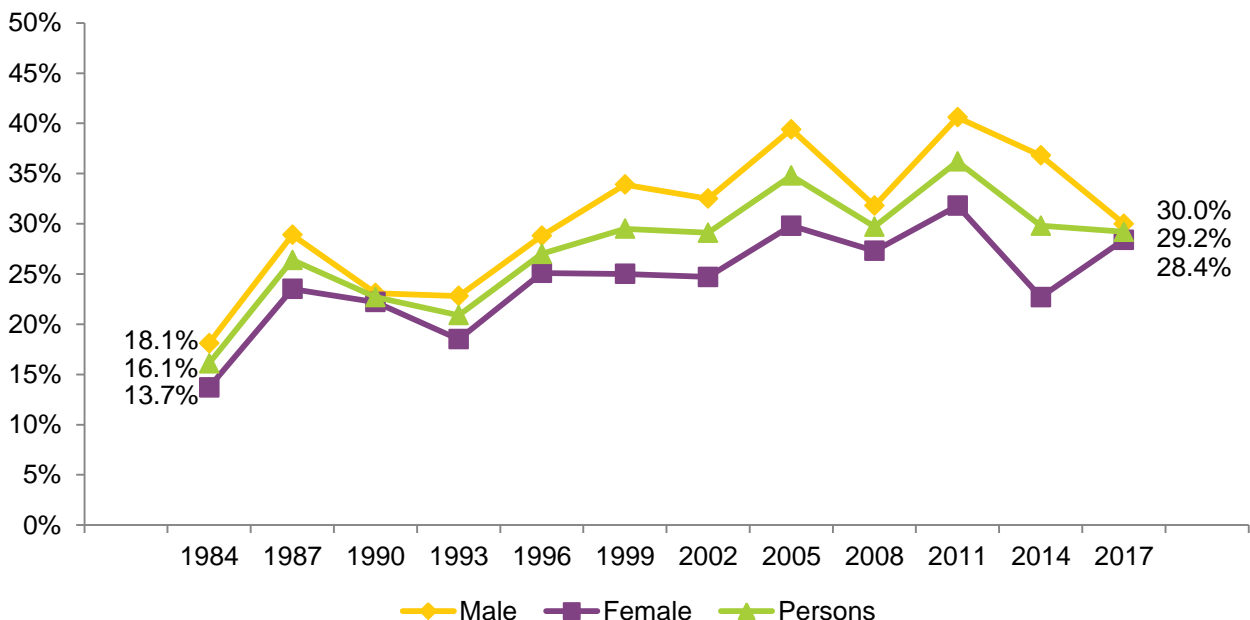


Little change in risky drinking over past two decades

As Figure 4 shows, there has been an increase in the proportion of students drinking at risky levels for single occasion harm from 1984 to 2017 (16.1% up to 29.2%). However, the proportion of students drinking at risky levels for single occasion harm has not changed significantly since 1996 (27.0%).

The mean number of drinks consumed over the past week by students who drank during the past week increased between 1984 and 2017 (4.8 up to 6.1). However, the mean number of drinks consumed over the past week has not changed significantly since 1996 either (approximately 6.0).

Figure 4. Trends in single occasion risky drinking for students who drank in the past week by gender, 12 to 17 years, 1984 to 2017.

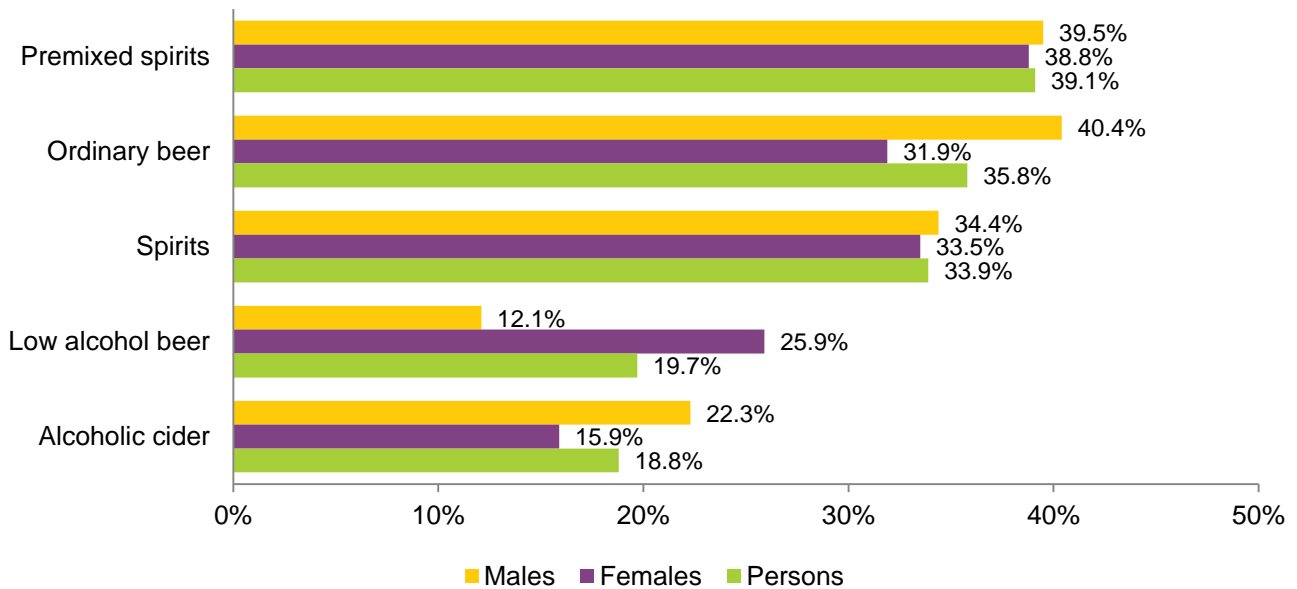


*Please note that 1984 – 2014 figures published in this bulletin may be slightly different to previous years' bulletins as the data has been re-analysed to exclude surveys that are incomplete or have incorrect answers.

Premixed spirits, spirits and beer are preferred

Students who drank in the past week were asked what drink they usually have (but could select more than one). Figure 5 shows the top five responses based on 12 to 17 year old preferences. Most students consumed premixed spirits (39.1%), ordinary beer (35.8%) and spirits (33.9%). Low alcohol beer (19.7%) and alcoholic cider (18.8%) were also common responses.

Figure 5. Top five usual alcoholic drinks for students who drank in the past week, 12 to 17 years, 2017.



Friends over 18 years and parents are the most common sources of alcohol

Students who drank in the past week were asked the source of their last alcoholic drink (but could select more than one). Figure 6 shows the top five responses for 12 to 17 year old students. An estimated one third of students sourced alcohol from a friend aged 18 years or over (33.6%) and nearly one quarter from parents (22.7%).

Students aged 16 to 17 years were most likely to source alcohol from a friend aged 18 years or over (47.2%), whereas students aged 12 to 15 years were most likely to source alcohol from parents (24.7%).

Figure 6. Top five sources of last alcoholic drink for students who drank in the past week, 12 to 17 years, 2017.

