

Alcohol Use Among Vermont Middle School Students

September 2025

Middle school is a critical window of opportunity to implement substance use prevention activities and identify at-risk students for early interventions and support. This is important because data from the [2023 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) show that middle school students who use alcohol are more likely to use other substances and experience poor mental health than peers who do not use alcohol. This brief examines past 30-day alcohol use among Vermont middle school students and provides examples of current programs, activities and recommendations to prevent underage alcohol use and promote the health of youth in Vermont.

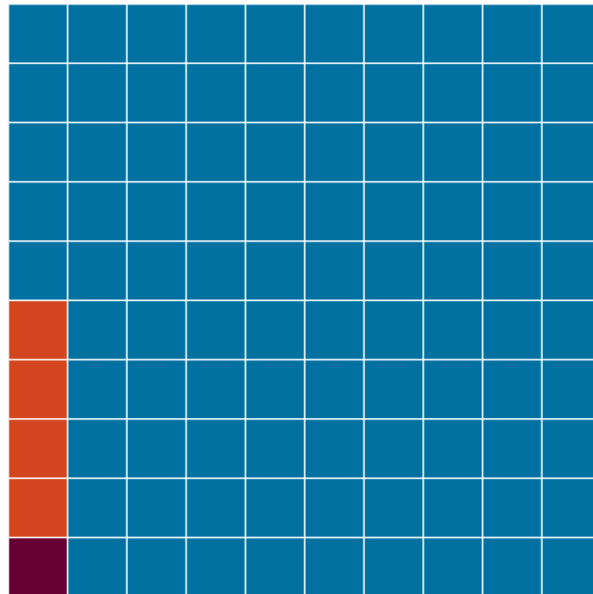
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Most middle school students report that they do not drink any alcohol.

95% report that they do not drink.

4% report some drinking.

1% report binge drinking.



Some drinking

Is defined as having at least one drink of alcohol on at least one day in the past 30 days, but do not drink at the level of binge drinking.

Binge drinking

Is defined as having four or more drinks of alcohol in a row, within a couple of hours, if you are female, and five or more drinks in a row if you are male, in the past 30 days.



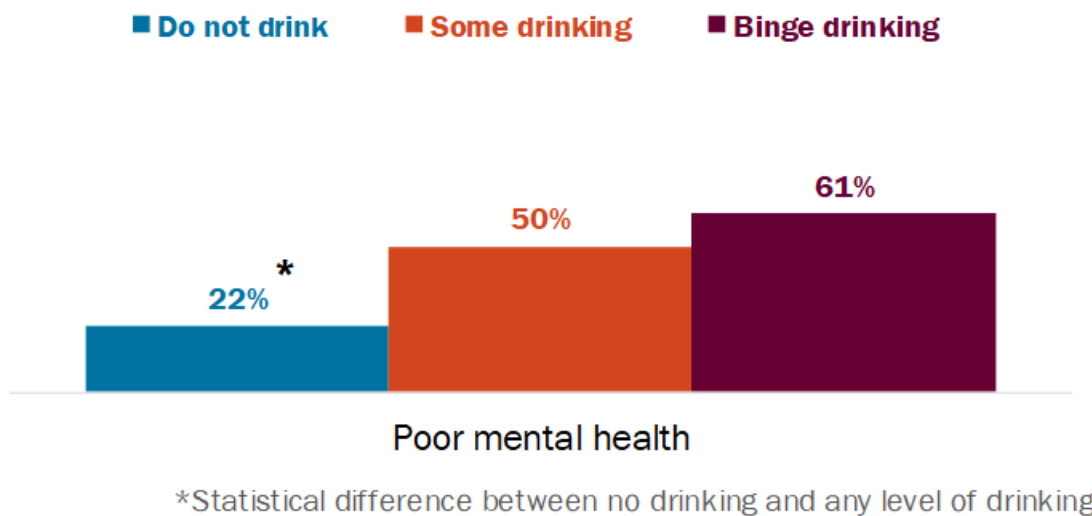
HealthVermont.gov
802-863-7200



Alcohol Use and Mental Health

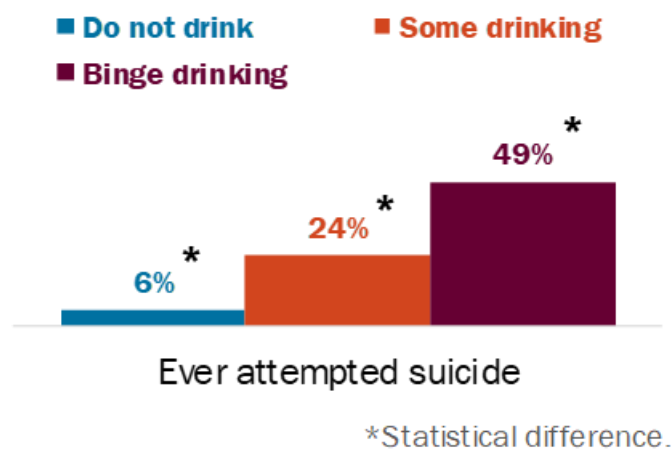
While the proportion of middle school students who drink alcohol is small, the increased rates of poor mental health among students who drink, especially those who binge drink, is a serious health concern. These data do not show that one causes another, but that there is some relationship between them. Poor mental health includes stress, anxiety, and depression.

Poor mental health is higher among middle school students who report drinking any alcohol.



Middle school students who drink alcohol are more likely to report that they attempted suicide in the past year than those who do not drink.

Middle school students who report binge drinking are eight times more likely to report that they have ever attempted suicide compared to those who did not drink alcohol and twice as likely as those who drank alcohol in smaller amounts.

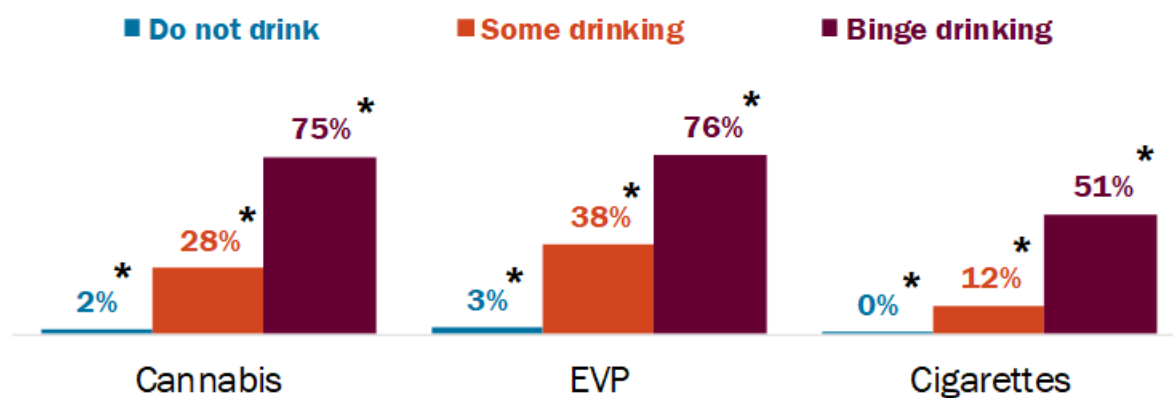


Use of Alcohol and Other Substances

Current Substance Use

While most students report that they do not drink any alcohol, students who report binge drinking are also significantly more likely to report using other substances, such as cannabis or electronic vapor products (EVPs). Of the middle school students who report binge drinking, 75% also report using cannabis, 76% report using EVPs, and 51% using cigarettes.

Middle school students who report binge drinking are significantly more likely to also report using cannabis, cigarettes or electronic vapor products than those who report a lower amount of drinking or do not drink.



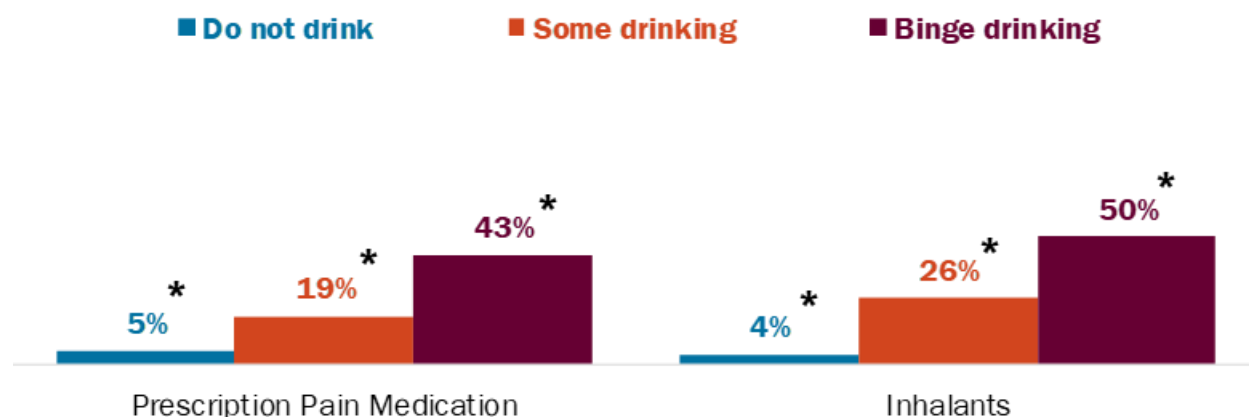
*All differences by level of drinking are statistically significant.

Lifetime substance misuse

Middle school students who report binge drinking are nearly nine times more likely to report ever using a prescription pain medicine such as codeine, Vicodin, OxyContin, hydrocodone, and Percocet without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it than those who report not drinking alcohol. Of the students who report binge drinking in the last 30 days, 43% also report that they had ever misused a prescription pain medication. Only 5% of those who report not drinking report pain medication misuse.

One in two middle school students who report binge drinking report that they have ever used an inhalant (sniffing glue, breathing the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaling paints or sprays to get high), while only one in 25 students who do not drink report ever using an inhalant.

Middle school students who report **binge drinking** are significantly more likely to also report ever using inhalants or misusing prescription pain medication than those who report a **lower amount of drinking** or **that they do not drink**.



*All differences by level of drinking are statistically significant.

Resources



- **For Support During a Mental Health Crisis:** [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#): If someone is experiencing a mental health and/or substance use crisis, the person, or someone who is concerned about them, can call, text, or [chat](#) 988 for free and confidential support 24-hours a day, seven days a week.



- **For Substance Use support:** Whether someone is seeking help for themselves or someone they care about, VT Helplink can connect them to the services they need. VT Helplink is a free resource for Vermonters, providing confidential, non-judgmental support and referrals to treatment, recovery, and other services. Helplink Specialists can help navigate Vermont's treatment and recovery system, whether or not someone has insurance. Visit VTHelplink.org.
- **For More Substance Use and Mental Health Support,** review [this collection of Vermont resources](#) to support youth, a supplement to this data brief.

Recommendations

Whether you are a parent, community member, or part of a school, there are ways to support youth, reduce risks, and increase protective factors.

Reinforce positive social norms.



Most students are not using alcohol. Students often believe more of their peers are using substances than the data show. Parents, schools, and communities can promote and normalize that most students choose to refrain from substance use.



Consider both substance use and mental health.

A student using a substance is also more likely to be experiencing poor mental health. When a student screens positively in either area, consider what additional supports the student may need. The student's pediatrician, school nurse, school counselor, or other trusted health professional can help with these concerns and the most appropriate next steps.