

One in four US high school students binge drinks: study

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Nearly one in four US high school students and one in seven adults binge drink, a public health danger that claims some 40,000 lives a year in the United States, a study showed Tuesday.

Calling it a "major public health problem," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defined binge drinking as having five or more drinks within a couple of hours for men, and four or more drinks in a couple of hours for women.

Around a quarter of all high school students -- including and one in three high school seniors -- binge drink, the study found.

"Ninety percent of the alcohol consumed by high school kids is consumed in the course of binge drinking and more than half of the alcohol consumed by adults is consumed in the course of binge drinking," said CDC director Thomas Frieden.

The hundreds of thousands of people who responded to two surveys used to compile the CDC study said they consumed an average of eight drinks during a binge drinking session, far above the official threshold, said Bob Brewer of the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

The bouts of heavy drinking increase the risk of being involved in a fatal car crash, contracting a sexually transmitted disease, dating violence, and drug overdoses, Frieden said.

It can also harm a developing fetus if a woman drinks to excess while pregnant.

"Binge drinking has many effects on the next generation through low-birth weight, birth defects and sudden infant death syndrome," he said.

The CDC found that about 15 percent of US adults, or 33 million Americans, binge drink, a rate

that has stayed the same for more than 15 years.

"It may be because binge drinking hasn't been widely recognized as a problem that it has not decreased in the past 15 years in this country," Frieden said, noting that most binge drinkers are not alcoholic and tend to binge drink no more than once a week.

Whites and Hispanics were more likely to binge drink than blacks, and binge drinking was most commonly reported by better-off people from households with incomes of 75,000 dollars a year or more, the CDC said.

Excessive alcohol use -- which includes but is not restricted to binge drinking -- is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States and can lead to health problems including liver disease, certain cancers, heart disease and stroke, the CDC said.

The CDC study was based on data gathered in 2009 from 412,000 US adults aged 18 years and older and 16,000 high school students.

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