

# Alcohol Use Among People Who Can Become Pregnant

MINNESOTA 2019-2021

## No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy or while trying to become pregnant

Pooled data from 2019-2021 suggests that 17.1% (95% CI: 11.5, 22.7) of pregnant people in Minnesota, aged 18-44 years, had consumed alcohol within the past 30 days. Based on this estimate, there were as many as 33,000 alcohol exposed pregnancies in Minnesota between 2019-2021.<sup>i</sup> Alcohol can cause problems with fetal development during any stage of pregnancy, including before a person knows they are pregnant. Alcohol passes from the pregnant parent to the baby through the umbilical cord. The baby's brain develops throughout pregnancy and can be affected by alcohol exposure at any time.

During the first three months of pregnancy, drinking alcohol can cause the baby to have abnormal facial features. Growth and central nervous system problems (e.g., low birthweight, brain injury, behavioral problems) can also occur. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs). FASDs have no cure, and present as a range of lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities.

## A concerning number of Minnesotans may be at risk of an alcohol-exposed pregnancy

Supplementary survey data collected in 2019 revealed a concerning number of Minnesotans who can become pregnant (people ages 18-44 years who were assigned female sex at birth) may be at risk of an alcohol-exposed pregnancy. Between 2019 and 2021, more than 50% of people who can become pregnant reported consuming alcohol within the last 30 days and over 20% had binge drank in the past month (i.e., consumed four or more drinks on any occasion). Moreover, 28.8% (95% CI: 25.9, 31.7) of those who had consumed alcohol in the past 30 days and 23.6% (95% CI: 19.3, 27.8) of those who had binge drank reported that they did not use any contraception methods the last time they had sex with a male partner.

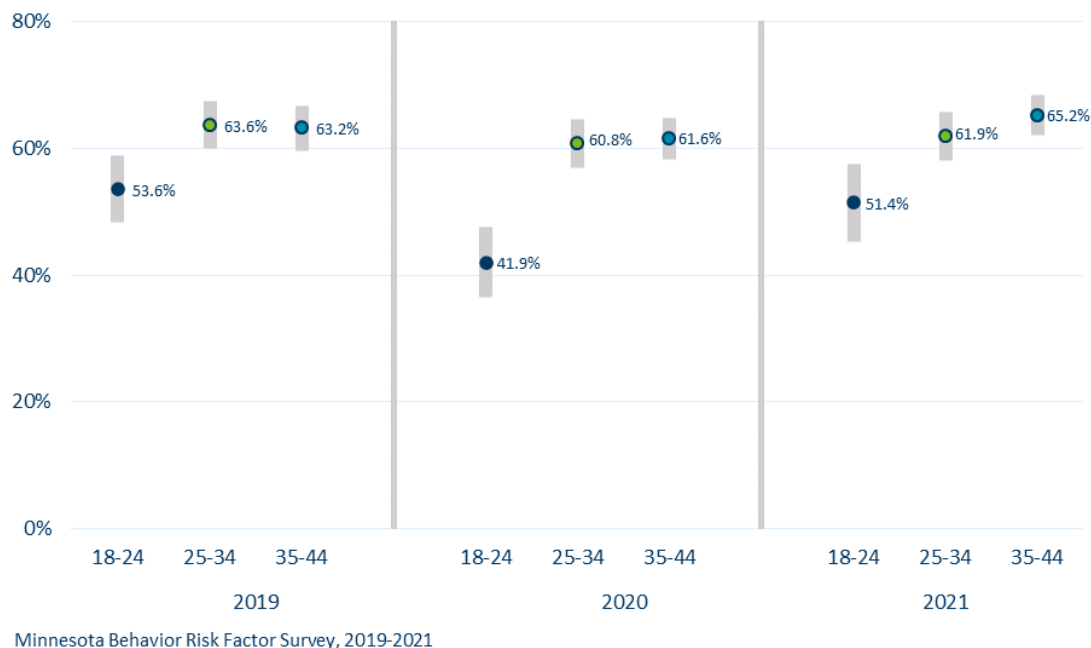
## Younger people who can become pregnant may drink alcohol less frequently but have a greater tendency to binge drink

Over the three-year period from 2019 to 2021, people aged 18 to 24 years who can become pregnant were consistently less likely to report consuming alcohol in the past 30 days compared to those aged 25-44 years (Figure 1). However, there were no significant differences by age group in recent binge drinking. Additionally, the average maximum number of drinks consumed on any single occasion in the last 30 days tended to decrease with age (Figure 2). This suggests that, while younger people may engage in fewer episodes of alcohol consumption, they may have a greater tendency to binge drink during such occasions.

<sup>i</sup> Based on the number of live births and the percent of pregnant individuals who reported any alcohol consumption during the previous month.

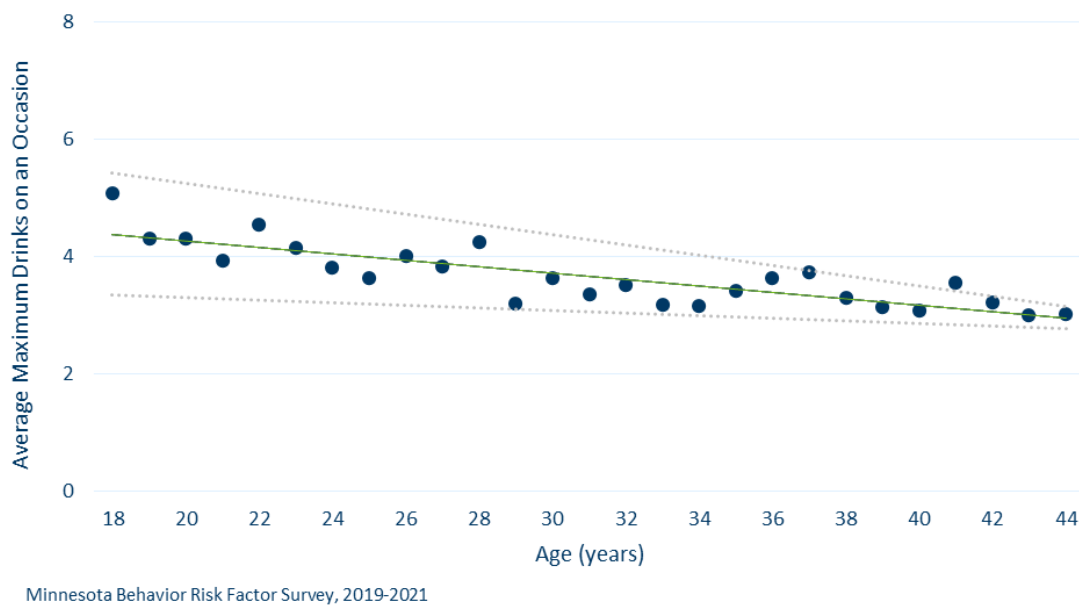
**Figure 1: Between 2019 and 2021, 18 to 24-year-olds who can become pregnant were less likely to have consumed alcohol in the past 30 days**

[Click here to see data table for Figure 1](#)



**Figure 2: On average, younger people who can become pregnant tend to consume a greater number of drinks on an occasion (2019-2021)**

[Click here to see data table for Figure 2](#)



## **Most people who can become pregnant were asked about alcohol use at their last clinic visit. However, less than a quarter received advice about the levels of drinking that may be harmful.**

Universal alcohol screening and brief intervention is one of the most important public health initiatives to prevent adverse alcohol-related outcomes, including alcohol exposed pregnancies. According to survey data collected in 2019, 91.1% (95% CI: 89.4, 92.7) of people who can become pregnant in Minnesota reported being asked if they drank alcohol during their last routine clinic visit. However, only 21.5% (95% CI: 19.2, 23.9) were offered advice about what level of drinking is harmful to health during their last check-up. This represents a missed opportunity for health care providers to discuss risks associated with alcohol use, correct common misconceptions, and discuss ways to limit fetal exposure with people who may be at risk of having an alcohol-exposed pregnancy.

## **Reducing alcohol-exposed pregnancies in Minnesota**

Diagnosing FASD is difficult, as there is not a singular medical test for these conditions. Often the signs and symptoms do not present until the child enters school, and other disorders such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have similar symptoms. Young adults born with FASD are more likely to experience disrupted school experiences, legal system involvement, and substance/alcohol use problems.

It can be difficult to refrain from drinking alcohol during pregnancy. If you are trying to get pregnant or are pregnant and find it difficult to avoid drinking alcohol, you are not alone. However, there are proactive steps you can take to ensure a healthy and alcohol-free pregnancy. Seek support from healthcare providers or dedicated resources, such as Proof Alliance's [Get Help to Stop Drinking During Pregnancy \(https://www.proofalliance.org/article/help-to-quit-drinking-during-pregnancy\)](https://www.proofalliance.org/article/help-to-quit-drinking-during-pregnancy), to receive the assistance you need.

If you are close with someone who is drinking alcohol during their pregnancy, there are ways you can encourage and support them in their efforts to stop, such as:

- Cut down your own drinking when around them to eliminate the extra temptation.
- Make mocktails or alcohol-free beverages to have with them on special occasions.
- Talk with family and friends about the health benefits of alcohol-free pregnancies.
- Provide them with resources to support them throughout their pregnancy (For examples, see [Proof Alliance Proof of Unwavering Support \(https://www.proofalliance.org/support/\)](https://www.proofalliance.org/support/)).

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## Data Tables

**Table 1: Percentage of people who can become pregnant that reported drinking any alcohol in the past 30 days by year and age group**

Year	Age Group	Percent (95% Confidence Interval)
2019	18-24	53.6 (48.4, 58.9)
2019	25-34	63.6 (59.9, 67.4)
2019	35-44	63.2 (59.7, 66.7)
2020	18-24	41.9 (36.4, 47.5)
2020	25-34	60.8 (56.9, 64.6)
2020	35-44	61.6 (58.3, 64.8)
2021	18-24	51.4 (45.3, 57.5)
2021	25-34	61.9 (58.1, 65.8)
2021	35-44	65.2 (62.0, 68.5)

**Table 2: Average maximum number of drinks on an occasion among people who can become pregnant by age, 2019-2021**

Age	Average (95% Confidence Interval)
18	5.1 (2.6, 7.6)
19	4.3 (3.2, 5.4)
20	4.3 (3.5, 5.1)
21	3.9 (3.3, 4.6)
22	4.5 (3.7, 5.4)
23	4.2 (3.5, 4.9)
24	3.8 (3.2, 4.4)
25	3.6 (3.0, 4.2)
26	4.0 (3.5, 4.6)
27	3.8 (3.2, 4.4)
28	4.2 (3.5, 5.0)
29	3.2 (2.8, 3.6)

## ALCOHOL USE AMONG PEOPLE WHO CAN BECOME PREGNANT

Age	Average (95% Confidence Interval)
30	3.6 (3.2, 4.1)
31	3.4 (2.9, 3.8)
32	3.5 (3.0, 4.0)
33	3.2 (2.8, 3.6)
34	3.2 (2.8, 3.5)
35	3.4 (2.9, 4.0)
36	3.6 (3.1, 4.2)
37	3.7 (3.2, 4.3)
38	3.3 (2.9, 3.6)
39	3.1 (2.8, 3.5)
40	3.1 (2.7, 3.4)
41	3.6 (2.9, 4.2)
42	3.2 (2.8, 3.6)
43	3.0 (2.6, 3.3)
44	3.0 (2.7, 3.4)

## Suggested Citation

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