

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

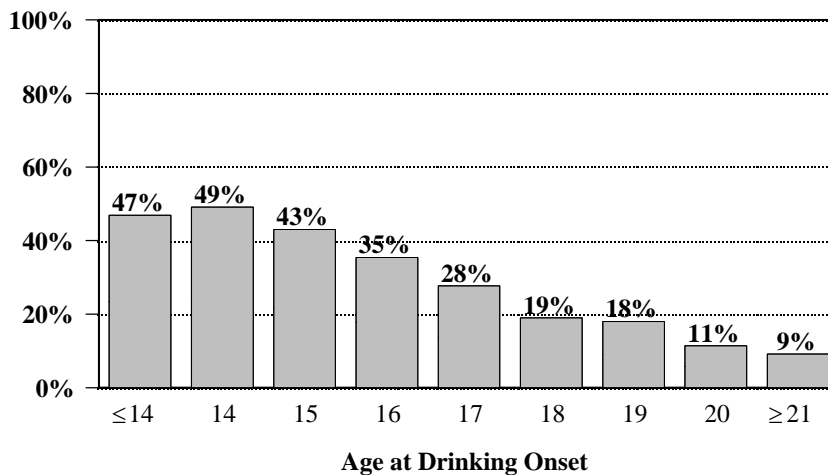
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## *Early Drinking Initiation Related to Ever Using Illicit Drugs*

The earlier a person begins drinking alcohol, the more likely they are to have ever used other drugs illicitly, according to an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey (NLAES). Approximately one-half of persons who began drinking at age 14 or younger had also used other drugs illicitly in their lifetime, compared to around one-tenth of those who began drinking at age 20 or older. Even after controlling for relevant sociodemographic and substance use factors\*, starting alcohol use at a younger age was the strongest independent predictor of ever using drugs illicitly. A similar relationship was found between age at first alcohol use and ever being drug dependent—persons who began drinking before age 14 were nearly three times more likely to have ever been drug dependent than those who began drinking after age 20 (data not shown). According to the authors, these findings “point to a need to further explore why people who start drinking at early ages . . . are more likely to use drugs and develop drug dependence” (p. 200).

### Percentage of U.S. Adult Drinkers Who Ever Used Other Drugs Illicitly, by Age at Drinking Onset

(N=27,616)



\*Factors controlled for were age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, cigarette use history, childhood depression, family history of alcoholism, and personal history of alcohol dependence.

NOTE: Among those who ever drank alcohol, 22% ever used illicit drugs. Of those, 39% began to drink at least 1 year before they started using drugs, 29% began both during the same year, and 32% started drug use at least a year before they began drinking.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Hingson, R.W., Heeren, T., and Edwards, E.M. “Age at Drinking Onset, Alcohol Dependence, and Their Relation to Drug Use and Dependence, Driving Under the Influence of Drugs, and Motor-Vehicle Crash Involvement Because of Drugs,” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 69(2):192-201, 2008.

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