ALCOHOL

The facts, the real numbers, and how to use them in your chapter's campaigns.

Know the Basics

What it is

Alcohol is a depressant. It slows down the brain and body, affecting judgment, coordination, reaction time and memory.

A brain still under construction

The brain keeps developing into the mid-20s. Drinking during the teen years can affect memory, learning and decision-making while those systems are still being built.

Starting early matters

People who start drinking before age 15 are several times more likely to develop an alcohol use disorder later in life than those who wait until 21.

One drink isn't always one drink

A standard drink is 12 oz of regular beer (about 5% alcohol), 5 oz of wine (about 12%) or 1.5 oz of liquor (about 40%). Hard seltzers, canned cocktails and mixed drinks often hold more than one.

What "binge drinking" means

Surveys count binge drinking as 5 or more drinks in a row. For younger and smaller teens, serious harm can start with fewer drinks.

THE REAL NUMBERS: INDIANA

93%
of Indiana 7th–12th graders did **not** drink alcohol in the past month. Just 7.1% did.

4.4%
of Indiana 12th graders reported binge drinking in the past two weeks, down from 16.7% in 2015.

Lowest
past-month drinking rates since 2015, with significant drops in every grade, 6th through 12th.

Source: 2026 Indiana Youth Survey

Indiana & the Nation

Grade	Drank alcohol in the past month		Binge drank in the past 2 weeks	
	Indiana (2026)	U.S. (2025)	Indiana (2026)	U.S. (2025)
8th	**4.9%**	4.3%	**1.1%**	1.4%
10th	**8.3%**	10.4%	**2.2%**	3.9%
12th	**12.8%**	22.3%	**4.4%**	8.7%

Compare with care: Indiana rates are lower than national rates in 10th and 12th grade, but slightly higher in 8th grade, so don't assume Indiana is lower across the board. Indiana figures come from the 2026 Indiana Youth Survey; U.S. figures come from Monitoring the Future 2025. The surveys reach different students in different years, so treat comparisons as a general picture.

Laws & Safety in Indiana

- **21** is the legal drinking age.
- **Under 21 and driving?** A blood alcohol level of 0.02% or higher, which can be as little as one drink, is illegal.
- **Indiana's Lifeline Law** protects an underage person from certain alcohol charges when they call 911 for someone who needs medical help, stay and cooperate.
- **Providing alcohol to anyone under 21** is illegal, including at a house party.

Signs of Alcohol Poisoning

Confusion, vomiting, seizures, slow or irregular breathing, pale or bluish skin, low body temperature, or can't be woken up.

Call 911. Never let someone "sleep it off." Stay with them and keep them on their side.

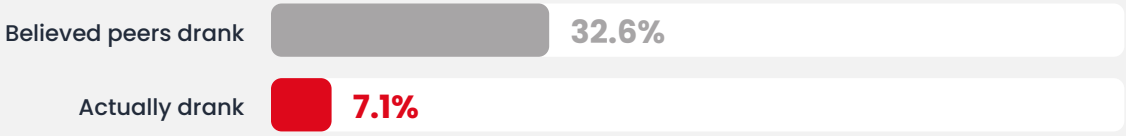
Need support? SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357. Free, confidential and open 24/7.

Using Data in a Norms Campaign

Social norms work when the numbers are accurate, local and believable.

When students believe "everyone drinks," they're more likely to drink. Social norms campaigns close that gap by showing the healthy majority. That only works if the numbers are right. Students spot exaggeration fast, and one bad statistic can sink the whole campaign.

The Perception Gap: What Indiana 7th–12th Graders Think vs. What's True



Past-month alcohol use, grades 7–12 combined, 2026 Indiana Youth Survey. Students overestimated peer use for every substance measured: alcohol, cannabis, cigarettes and prescription drugs.

DO

- **Lead with the healthy majority:** "93% of Indiana students in grades 7–12 didn't drink in the past month."
- **Use the most local, recent data you can find.** School data beats county data, and county data beats state data.
- **Match the data to your audience.** Use high school numbers for a high school campaign.
- **Name the source and year** on every message, like "2026 Indiana Youth Survey."
- **Test messages with peers.** If it doesn't feel believable, revise it.

DON'T

- **Spotlight the problem** ("1 in 8 seniors drinks!"). It can make drinking seem more normal.
- **Mix numbers** from different surveys, grades or years into one statistic.
- **Round in ways that change the meaning.** 12.8% is "about 1 in 8," not "only 1 in 10."
- **Use national numbers when local data exist,** and always say "nationally" when you do.
- **Rely on scare tactics or shame.** They tend to backfire with teens.

Message Makeover

WEAK

"Underage drinking is out of control at our school!"

STRONGER

"Most of us make the choice not to drink. 9 out of 10 [School] students didn't drink in the past month."

[Insert your local number and source.]

Find Your Local Data

1. **Ask your school counselor or principal** whether your school took part in the Indiana Youth Survey. Participating schools get their own report.
2. **Contact your county's Local Coordinating Council (LCC)** or local prevention coalition. Many have county-level data.
3. **Visit inys.indiana.edu** for statewide and regional results.
4. **No local data?** Use state data and label it clearly as Indiana statewide.

Sources: Indiana Youth Survey 2026, Prevention Insights, IU School of Public Health-Bloomington; Monitoring the Future 2025, University of Michigan/NIDA; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).