

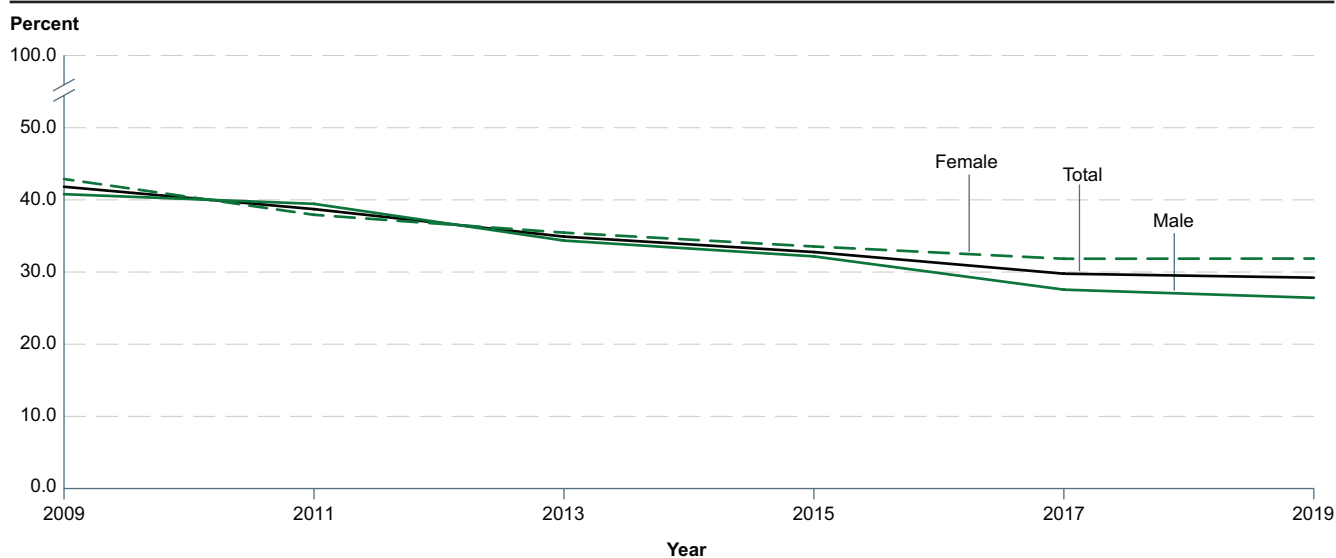
Students' Use of Alcohol

The percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days decreased from 42 to 29 percent between 2009 and 2019.

This indicator uses data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) to examine the percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported using alcohol during the previous 30 days.¹ Adolescent alcohol use is associated with various negative outcomes, such as suicide ideation,

delinquency, and risky behaviors.^{2,3,4} In the United States, the purchase or public possession of alcohol anywhere is illegal until age 21, except in the company of a parent or legal-age spouse in certain states.

Figure 1. Percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported using alcohol at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, by sex: Selected years, 2009 through 2019



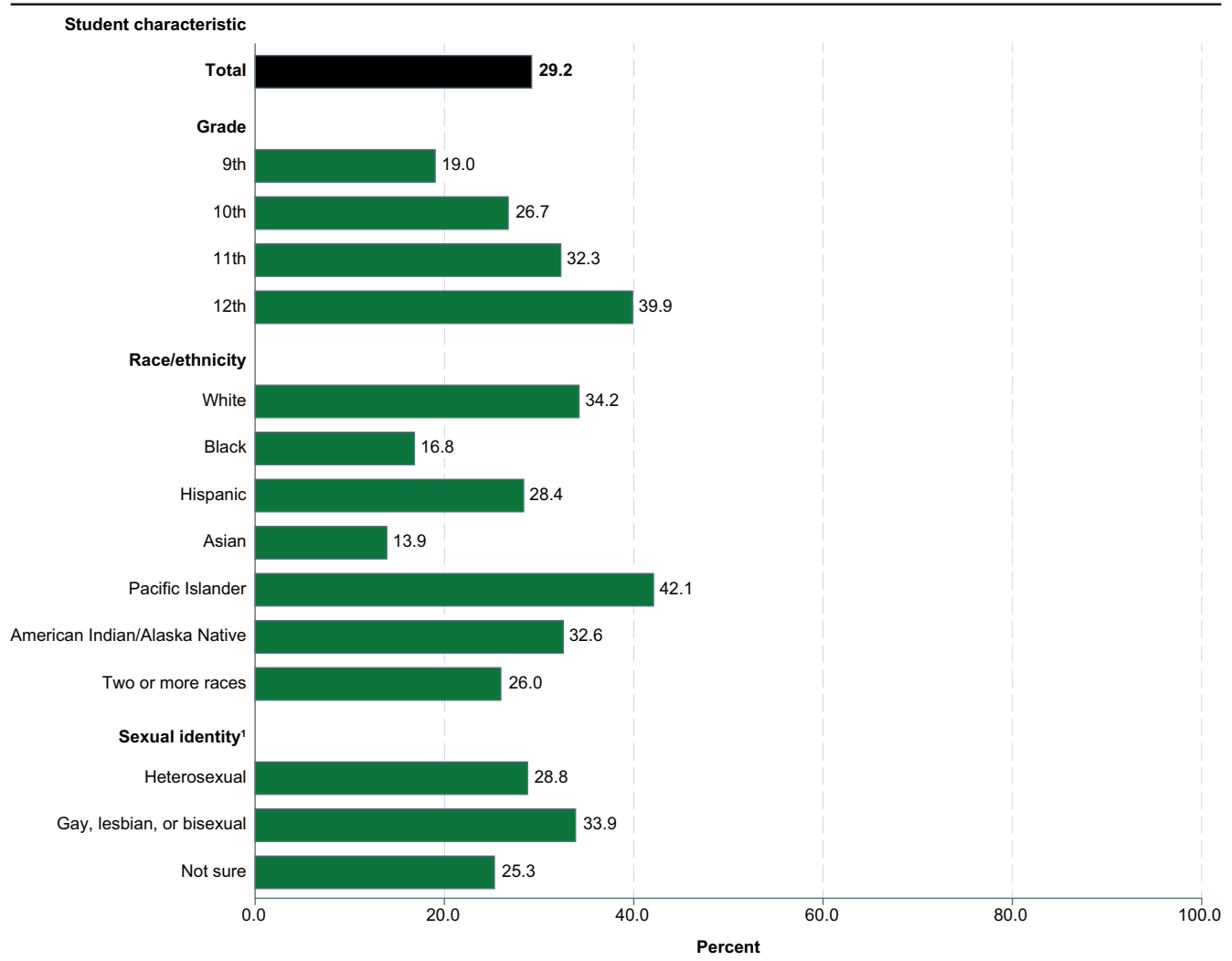
SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), 2009 through 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 232.10.

In 2019, about 29 percent of students in grades 9–12 reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days (ranging from 10 percent in Utah to 33 percent in Kansas and Montana).^{5,6} About 16 percent of students reported using alcohol on 1 or 2 days during the previous 30 days, 13 percent reported using alcohol on 3 to 29 of the previous 30 days, and 1 percent reported using alcohol on all of the previous 30 days. Between 2009 and 2019, the overall percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days decreased from 42 to 29 percent.

Similar to the pattern for students in grades 9–12 overall, the percentage of students who reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days decreased for

both male (from 41 to 26 percent) and female (from 43 to 32 percent) students between 2009 and 2019. By 2017, the percentage of students who reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 was higher for female students (32 percent) than for male students (28 percent), although there had been no measurable difference in any survey year between 2009 and 2015. In 2019, the higher percentage of female students reporting this behavior (32 vs. 26 percent) was largely driven by the higher percentage of female students who reported using alcohol on 1 or 2 days during the previous 30 days, compared with male students (19 vs. 13 percent). However, a higher percentage of male students than of female students reported using alcohol on all of the previous 30 days in 2019 (0.8 vs. 0.4 percent).

Figure 2. Percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported using alcohol at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, by selected student characteristics: 2019



¹ Students were asked which of the following—"heterosexual (straight)," "gay or lesbian," "bisexual," or "not sure"—best described them.

NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 232.10.

In 2019, the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported using alcohol during the previous 30 days increased with grade level. About 19 percent of 9th-graders reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, compared with 27 percent of 10th-graders, 32 percent of 11th-graders, and 40 percent of 12th-graders. Not only did the percentage of students reporting any alcohol use increase with grade level, but the percentage of students who reported more frequent alcohol use (3 to 29 days of the previous 30 days) also increased. Specifically, 8 percent of 9th-graders reported using alcohol on 3 to 29 days of the previous 30 days, compared with 10 percent of 10th-graders, 13 percent of 11th-graders, and 20 percent of 12th-graders. However, there were no measurable differences by grade level in the percentage of students who reported using alcohol on all of the previous 30 days.

Considering differences by race/ethnicity in 2019, the percentage of students who reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days was lower for Asian students (14 percent) and Black students (17 percent) than for students of all other racial/ethnic groups (ranging from 26 percent for students of Two or more races to 42 percent for Pacific Islander students). In addition, the percentage was lower for students of Two or more races and Hispanic students (28 percent) than for White students (34 percent).

In 2019, the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported using alcohol during the previous 30 days also varied by sexual identity.⁷ In 2019, about 34 percent of gay, lesbian, or bisexual students reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, which was higher than the percentages of heterosexual students (29 percent) and students who were not sure about their sexual identity (25 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ In 2011 and earlier years, the YRBSS also collected data on student alcohol use on school property during the previous 30 days. Readers interested in these data should refer to the reference tables or earlier editions of the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* report.

² French, M.T., and Maclean, J.C. (2006). Underage Alcohol Use, Delinquency, and Criminal Activity. *Health Economics*, 15(12): 1261-1281. Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/hec.1126>.

³ Mason, W.A., Hitch, J.E., Kosterman, R., McCarty, C.A., Herrenkohl, T.I., and Hawkins, J.D. (2010). Growth in Adolescent Delinquency and Alcohol Use in Relation to Young Adult Crime, Alcohol Use Disorders, and Risky Sex: A Comparison of Youth From Low- Versus Middle-Income Backgrounds. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51(12): 1377-1385. Retrieved November 10, 2020, from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2010.02292.x>.

⁴ Schilling, E.A., Aseltine, R.H., Jr., Glanovsky, J.L., James, A., and Jacobs, D. (2009). Adolescent Alcohol Use, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicide Attempts. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 44(4): 335-341. Retrieved November 10, 2020, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X08003376>.

⁵ U.S. total data are representative of all public and private school students in grades 9-12 in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. U.S. total data were collected through a separate national survey rather than being aggregated from state-level data. The rest of this indicator is based on data from the national survey.

⁶ In 2019, data at the *state level* were available for 44 states and the District of Columbia. For detailed state-level data on the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported using alcohol on at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, see [the table on current alcohol use for all locations in the YRBSS Youth Online Data Analysis Tool](#).

⁷ Since 2015, the YRBSS has included a question on students' sexual identity by asking students in grades 9-12 which of the following best described them—“heterosexual (straight),” “gay or lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “not sure.” In this indicator, students who identified as “gay or lesbian” or “bisexual” are discussed together as the “gay, lesbian, or bisexual” group. Students were not asked whether they identified as transgender in the YRBSS.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, tables 232.10 and 232.20

Related indicators and resources: [Marijuana Use and Illegal Drug Availability](#); [Serious Disciplinary Actions Taken by Public Schools](#); [Violent and Other Criminal Incidents Recorded by Public Schools and Those Reported to the Police](#); [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2019](#)

Glossary: Private school; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; Sexual identity (Youth Risk Behavior Survey System)