

# More young people are choosing not to drink alcohol

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Young people in England aren't just drinking less alcohol—a new study published in *BMC Public Health* shows that more of them are never taking up alcohol at all, and that the increase is widespread among young people.

Researchers at University College London analysed data from the annual

Health Survey for England and found that the proportion of 16-24 year olds who don't drink [alcohol](#) has increased from 18% in 2005 to 29% in 2015.

The authors found this trend to be largely due to an increasing number of [people](#) who had never been drinkers, from 9% in 2005 to 17% in 2015. There were also significant decreases in the number of [young people](#) who drank above recommended limits (from 43% to 28%) or who binge drank (27% to 18%). More young people were also engaging in weekly abstinence (from 35% to 50%)

Dr. Linda Ng Fat, corresponding author of the study said: "Increases in non-drinking among young people were found across a broad range of groups, including those living in northern or southern regions of England, among the white population, those in full-time education, in employment and across all social classes and healthier groups. That the increase in non-drinking was found across many different groups suggests that non-drinking may becoming more mainstream among young people which could be caused by cultural factors."

Dr. Ng Fat said: "These trends are to be welcomed from a public-health standpoint. Factors influencing the shift away from drinking should be capitalised on going forward to ensure that healthier drinking behaviours in young people continue to be encouraged."

Dr. Linda Ng Fat added: "The increase in young people who choose not to drink alcohol suggests that this behaviour maybe becoming more acceptable, whereas risky behaviours such as binge drinking may be becoming less normalised."

Increases in non-drinking however were not found among ethnic minorities, those with [poor mental health](#) and smokers suggesting that the risky behaviours of smoking and alcohol continue to cluster.

The researchers examined data on 9,699 people aged 16-24 years collected as part of the Health Survey for England 2005-2015, an annual, cross-sectional, nationally representative survey looking at changes in the health and lifestyles of people across England. The authors analysed the proportion of non-drinkers among social demographic and [health](#) sub-groups, along with alcohol units consumed by those that did drink and levels of [binge drinking](#).

The authors caution that the cross-sectional, observational nature of this study does not allow for conclusions about cause and effect.

**More information:** Linda Ng Fat et al, Investigating the growing trend of non-drinking among young people; analysis of repeated cross-sectional surveys in England 2005–2015, *BMC Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-018-5995-3](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5995-3)

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