

MEDIA RELEASE

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RESEARCH REVEALS SCHOOLIES ALCOHOL ALARM

New research has revealed young people are consuming an average of nearly nine standard alcoholic drinks a session during Schoolies Week celebrations, with one in five Schoolies experiencing alcohol-related harm.

A Turning Point study of young people who spent Schoolies Week at popular Victorian surf coast holiday spots Lorne and Torquay found that Schoolies consumed an average of 8.8 standard alcoholic drinks in a current session¹, with men drinking up to 10 drinks on average.

According to the study, 18.3 per cent of young people interviewed recorded a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of greater than 0.08, with those surveyed recording an overall average BAC of 0.05.

Researchers also found that one in five participants had experienced alcohol-related harm at Schoolies Week, including aggressive incidents, alcohol-related injury and engagement in unprotected sex.

The findings are reported in the study, 'High rates of alcohol consumption and related harm at Schoolies Week'.

The research involved interviews conducted on four nights over two weekends in November 2012 during the Schoolies Week period. It included breathalyser tests and brief surveys measuring alcohol, energy drink and illicit drug use, and experience of aggressive incidents, alcohol-related injury and unprotected sex. It was undertaken with more than 500 young people attending Schoolies Week in Lorne and Torquay in 2012.

The study also found that:

- Around 90 per cent of young people had consumed alcohol in the previous 12 hours before being interviewed by researchers during Schoolies Week.
- Each alcoholic drink consumed increased the potential for involvement in aggressive incidents by 8 per cent and alcohol related accidents and injuries by 5 per cent.
- Illicit drug use was associated with six times the likelihood of engaging in unprotected sex with a non-partner.

With the end of the school year fast approaching for year 12 students, Turning Point director

¹ 'Current session' referred to the 12 hours preceding a subject's interview. Interviews were conducted on four nights over two weekends in November 2012 during the Schoolies Week period.

and report co-author Prof Dan Lubman warned young people to exercise caution when out celebrating.

He said Schoolies Week was often the first opportunity for extended socialisation with friends without parental or teacher supervision.

“Schoolies Week often takes place around the time when many young people are reaching the legal age at which they can purchase alcohol or drive unsupervised,” Prof Lubman said.

“However, it is important that young people are aware of the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption and other drug use.”

The use of alcohol with energy drinks was also an increasing concern, according to Prof Lubman.

The research found that one in six participants had consumed alcohol with energy drinks, with participants who co-consumed alcohol and energy drinks recording a higher BAC than alcohol-only users.

Prof Lubman said harm reduction initiatives targeting Schoolies Week should be given strong consideration.

“We need to reinforce the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption, illicit drugs and the co-consumption of alcohol and energy drinks, and ensure those attending Schoolies Week look after themselves, and their mates.”

As well as Prof Lubman, the report’s co-authors were Nic Droste, Amy Pennay, Shannon Hyder and Peter Miller. The study was funded by the Australian Research Council and VicHealth and published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

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