

Change in the Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Binge and Heavy Drinking Definitions, 2005-2006

History

The Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing surveillance program developed and partly funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to estimate prevalence of risk factors for the major causes of morbidity and mortality. The prevalence of binge and heavy drinking risk factors are calculated from questions regarding alcohol use.

Until 2004, the CDC defined binge drinking as consuming five or more drinks on one occasion, and defined heavy drinking as consuming in excess of an average of two drinks per day (more than 60 drinks in the past 30 days). In 2005, the CDC adopted new, gender specific definitions, approved by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), for binge and heavy drinking.⁴ For males, binge drinking remains defined as consuming five or more drinks per occasion, and heavy drinking as consuming more than an average of two drinks per day. However, for females, binge drinking is now defined as consuming four or more drinks on one occasion, and heavy drinking as consuming more than one drink per day, on average (more than 30 drinks in the past 30 days).⁵

Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol consumption has immediate effects that can increase the risk of certain diseases, conditions, and involvement in health risk behaviors.¹ Binge and heavy drinking increase the risk for cirrhosis, cancer, heart disease, stroke, and depression.^{2,3} As of 2005, excessive alcohol use was the third leading lifestyle-related cause of death for people in the United States.²

Research has suggested that the effect of alcohol consumption varies depending on body structure and chemistry. Generally, women have smaller body structures, carry more body fat and less body water, and have different stomach enzymes than men.^{4,5} These differences cause women to absorb more alcohol and take longer to break down alcohol in the blood stream, resulting in higher blood alcohol levels when drinking the same amount as men. Higher blood alcohol levels increase the body's vulnerability to the damaging effects of alcohol consumption.^{4,5}

Changes in BRFSS Alcohol Consumption Questions 2004 vs. 2005-2006

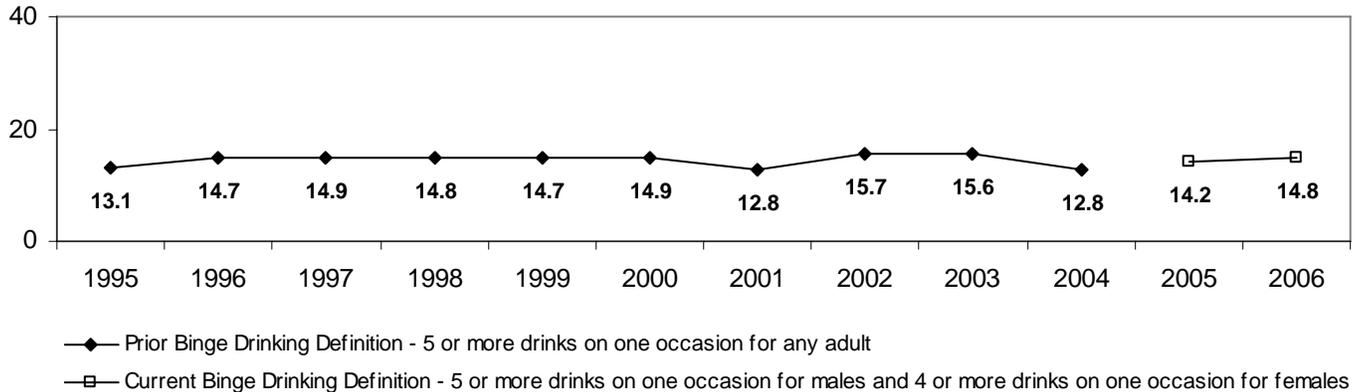
The revised definitions for binge and heavy drinking were implemented in the 2005 and 2006 BRFSS. Please refer to the table below for question wording by year.

| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| Binge Drinking | <p><u>For Males and Females</u></p> <p>1. A drink of alcohol is 1 can or bottle of beer, 1 glass of wine, 1 can or bottle of wine cooler, 1 cocktail or 1 shot of liquor. During the past 30 days, how many days per week or per month did you have at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage?</p> <p>2. Considering all types of alcoholic beverages, how many times during the past 30 days did you have 5 or more drinks on an occasion?</p> | <p><u>For Males</u></p> <p>1. During the past 30 days, have you had at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage such as beer, wine, a malt beverage or liquor?</p> <p>2. During the past 30 days, how many days per week or per month did you have at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage?</p> <p>3. Considering all types of alcoholic beverages, how many times during the past 30 days did you have 5 or more drinks on one occasion?</p> <p><u>For Females</u></p> <p>1. Same as above.</p> <p>2. Same as above.</p> <p>3. During the past 30 days, what is the largest number of drinks you had on any occasion?</p> | <p><u>For Males</u></p> <p>1. No change from 2005.</p> <p>2. No change from 2005.</p> <p>3. No change from 2005.</p> <p><u>For Females</u></p> <p>1. No change from 2005.</p> <p>2. No change from 2005.</p> <p>3. Considering all types of alcoholic beverages, how many times during the past 30 days did you have 4 or more drinks on one occasion?</p> |
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
| Heavy Drinking | <p><u>For Males and Females</u></p> <p>1. A drink of alcohol is 1 can or bottle of beer, 1 glass of wine, 1 can or bottle of wine cooler, 1 cocktail or 1 shot of liquor. During the past 30 days, how many days per week or per month did you have at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage?</p> <p>2. On the days when you drank, about how many drinks did you drink on the average?</p> | <p><u>For Males and Females</u></p> <p>1. During the past 30 days, have you had at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage such as beer, wine, a malt beverage or liquor?</p> <p>2. During the past 30 days, how many days per week or per month did you have at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage?</p> <p>3. One drink is equivalent to a 12 ounce beer, a 4 ounce glass of wine, or a drink with one shot of liquor. On the days when you drank, during the past 30 days, about how many drinks did you drink on the average?</p> | <p><u>For Males and Females</u></p> <p>1. No change from 2005.</p> <p>2. No change from 2005.</p> <p>3. No change from 2005.</p> |

Binge Drinking, 1995-2004 vs. 2005-2006

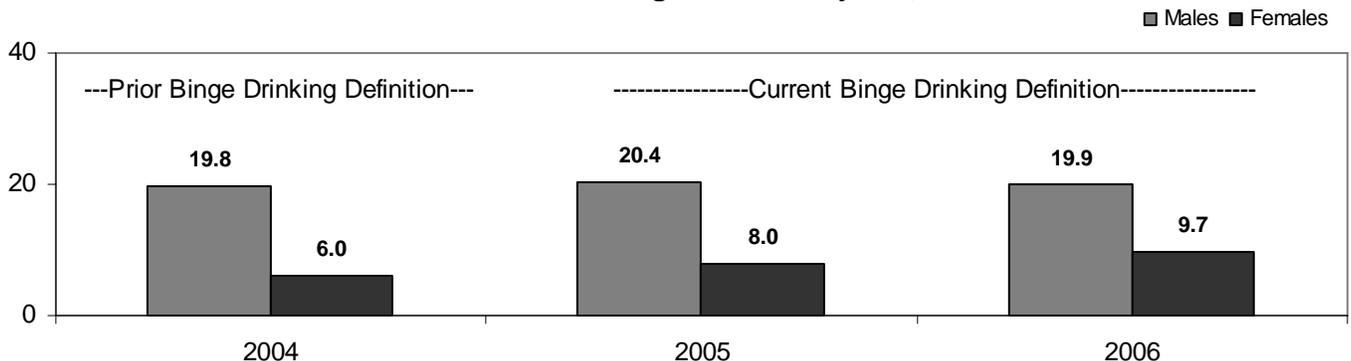
The prevalence of binge drinking among Idaho adults did not significantly change between 1995 and 2004. In 2005, 14.2 percent of Idaho adults were binge drinkers. This is the first year that the gender specific definitions were used to calculate statewide prevalence of binge drinking. The current, gender specific definition used in 2005 and 2006 resulted in figures that are within the range of figures observed from 1995 to 2004, when the prior definition for binge drinking was used.

Percent of Idaho adults who were binge drinkers, 1995-2006



In 2004 (when the prior definition for binge drinking was used), a slightly lower percentage of females were categorized as binge drinkers than in 2005 and 2006 (which used the current, gender-specific definition). Among males, the prevalence of binge drinking in 2004 was similar to that of 2005 and 2006 (which used the current definition).

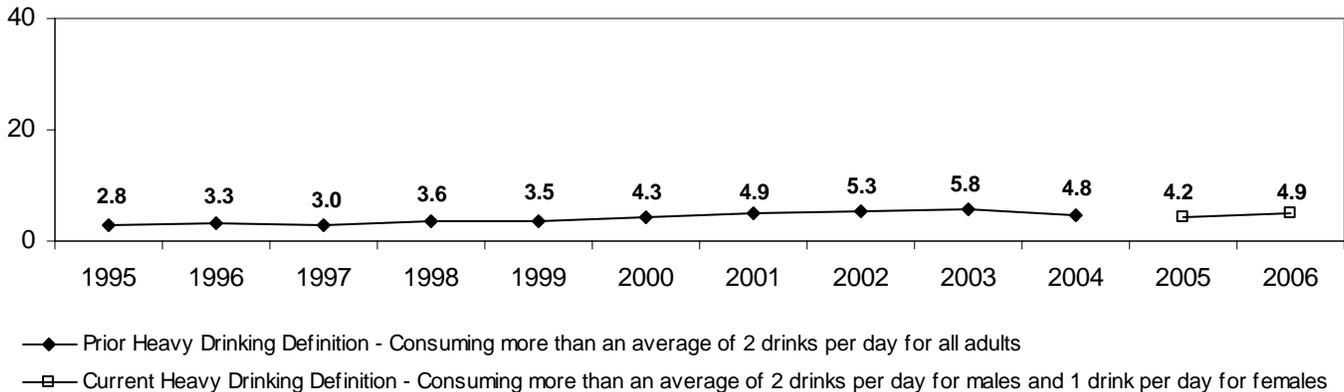
Percent of Idaho adults binge drinkers by sex, 2004-2006



Heavy Drinking 1995-2004 vs. 2005-2006

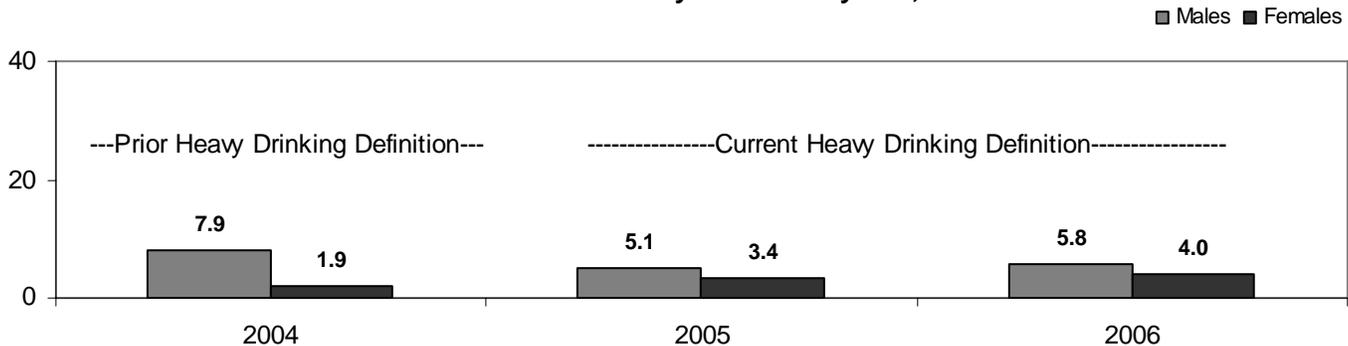
The prevalence of heavy drinking among Idaho adults slowly, but significantly, trended upward from 2.8 percent in 1995 to 4.8 percent in 2004. In 2005 (using the current, gender-specific definition), 4.2 percent of Idaho adults were heavy drinkers. Although 2005 and 2006 used the gender-specific definitions to calculate statewide prevalence of heavy drinking, the figures remained within the range observed from 1995 to 2004.

Percent of Idaho adults who were heavy drinkers, 1995-2006



Using the current definition, 4.0 percent of females were heavy drinkers in 2006. This is higher than the 1.9 percent seen in 2004, using the prior definition. The prevalence of male heavy drinkers in 2005 and 2006 (using the current definition) was slightly lower than the prevalence in 2004 (which used the prior definition).

Percent of Idaho adult heavy drinkers by sex, 2004-2006



1. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, National Institutes of Health, *10th Special Report to US Congress on Alcohol and Health*, October 2000, <<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/10report/intro.pdf>> (accessed July 5, 2006).
2. Alcohol and Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Alcohol and Public Health*, June 2006, <<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm>> (accessed June 12, 2006).
3. American Cancer Society, *Alcohol and Cancer*, 2006, <<http://www.cancer.org/downloads/PRO/alcohol.pdf>> (accessed October 12, 2006).
4. Alcohol and Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *QuikStats: Excessive Alcohol Use and Risks to Women's Health*, June 2006, <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/quickstats/womens_health.htm> (accessed, July 3, 2007).
5. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, National Institutes of Health, *Alcohol Alert: Moderate Drinking*, April 1992, <<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/aa16.htm>> (accessed July 3, 2007).
6. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, National Institutes of Health, *NIAAA Newsletter*, Winter 2004, <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Newsletter/winter2004/Newsletter_Number3.pdf> (accessed July 5, 2006).
7. Alcohol and Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *QuikStats: Binge Drinking*, June 2006, <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/quickstats/binge_drinking.htm> (accessed October 5, 2006).