



Burden of Alcohol in Dane County

August 2024

Dane County is significantly impacted by the effects of alcohol misuse. This report examines drinking behavior and its impact on people and the environment, including alcohol use rates, motor vehicle crashes, and alcohol-related deaths in Dane County.

Excessive drinking can lead to long-term health conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, liver disease, stroke, depression, anxiety, memory problems, and cancer.

The types of excessive drinking are:

- **Binge drinking**—Drinking so much alcohol at once that there is 0.08% or more alcohol in your blood. For most people, this means drinking at least four or five standard drinks within a few hours.
- **Heavy drinking**—Having more than 3-4 standard drinks in one day.
- Any alcohol use by **pregnant women** or anyone **younger than 21 years old**.



Adult Drinking

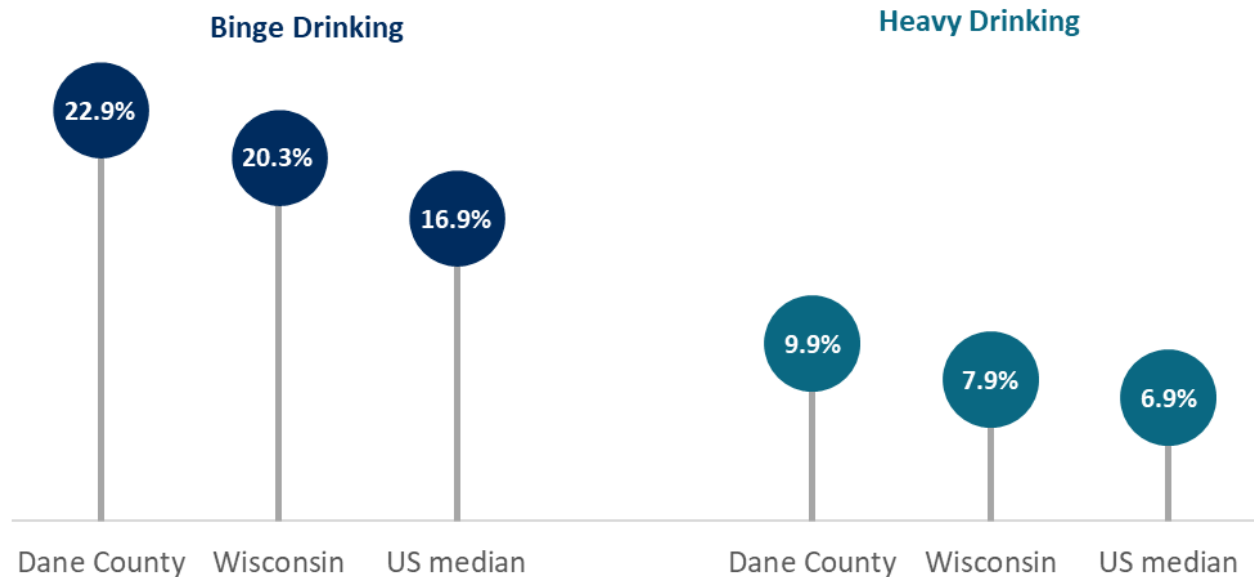
Binge drinking is the most common form of excessive drinking in the United States and costs Dane County an estimated [\\$397.7 million annually](#).

Based on the most recent national survey estimates from 2022, a greater proportion of Dane County adults (ages 18+) reported binge drinking and heavy drinking compared to the US median. Dane County ranks 10th in Wisconsin in adult binge drinking and 27th for heavy drinking among all WI counties.



Adult Drinking (cont.)

A greater proportion of Dane County adults (ages 18+) reported binge drinking and heavy drinking in 2022 compared to the U.S. median. Results were similar between Dane County and Wisconsin.



Data sources: Binge Drinking :Wisconsin Department of Health Services, DHS Interactive Dashboards, Alcohol Adult Consumption Module [web query]. Heavy Drinking: Wisconsin Interactive Statistics on Health, BRFSS Module (Dane County and Wisconsin); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (US).

Young Adults

According to the [Monitoring the Future 2023 annual report](#), measures of excessive drinking for young adults ages 19-30 have improved over the last decade. The percent of young adults reporting daily drinking declined from 9.1% to 8.5%, and binge drinking declined from 35.2% to 30.5%.

Adults 35-50

This same report detailed *increases* in excessive drinking for adults ages 35-50. While there have been no significant changes in daily drinking over the last decade, the percent of people reporting binge drinking has increased from 22.8% to 29.2%.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) highlights many short-term consequences of binge drinking, including:

- Injuries, such as [motor vehicle crashes](#), falls, drownings, and burns.
- Violence, including homicide, suicide, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence.
- Alcohol poisoning, a medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels.
- Risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners. These behaviors can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.
- Miscarriage and stillbirth or [fetal alcohol spectrum disorders \(FASDs\)](#) among pregnant people.

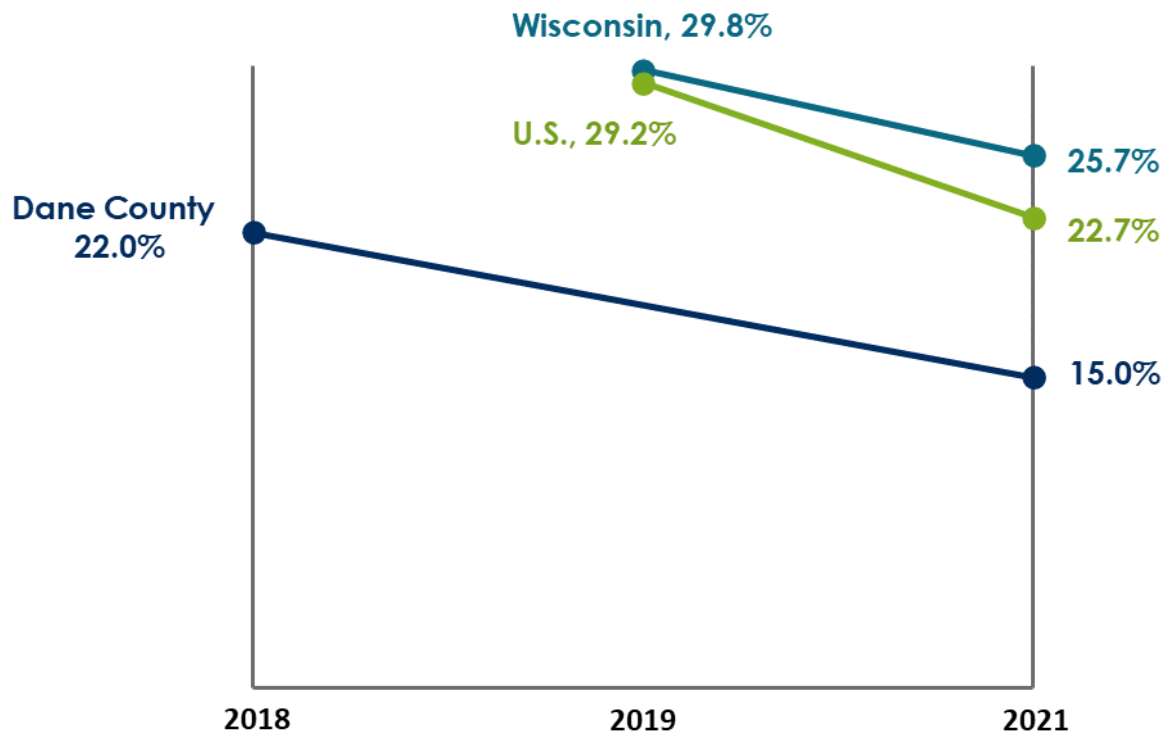


Youth Drinking

Alcohol use interferes with adolescent brain development

The adolescent brain develops well into their 20s, and alcohol use at a young age, especially heavy drinking, may [cause learning problems](#) and [increase vulnerability](#) for alcohol use disorder (AUD).

In 2021, 15% of Dane County high school students reported drinking alcohol in the last 30 days. This is lower than the US (22.7%) and Wisconsin (25.7%) averages, and lower than Dane County students in 2018.



Data sources: Dane County Youth Assessment (Dane County), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Wisconsin, U.S.).

National youth drinking trends

The National 2021 [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) found that among high school students nationally, during the past 30 days, 23% drank alcohol and 11% binge drank. Youth drinking can be influenced by many factors, including:

- **Family involvement.** A risk factor for youth drinking is the acceptance of and amount of drinking by adults. A 5% increase in binge drinking among adults in a community is associated with a 12% increase in the chance of underage drinking. Additionally, among adolescents whose peers drink alcohol, those whose parents binge drink are more likely to drink alcohol than those whose parents do not.
- **External factors.** External risk factors for youth drinking include advertising and peer pressure. Additional internal risk factors include genetics, trauma, behavior patterns, and diagnosed anxiety disorders.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic.** Alcohol use among high school students declined during the 2019-21 pandemic years, continuing a downward 10-year trend. [According to the CDC](#), the declines in adolescent substance use might be partially explained by pandemic-specific contextual factors, including decreased access to substances because of reduced contact with peers and increases in parental supervision.



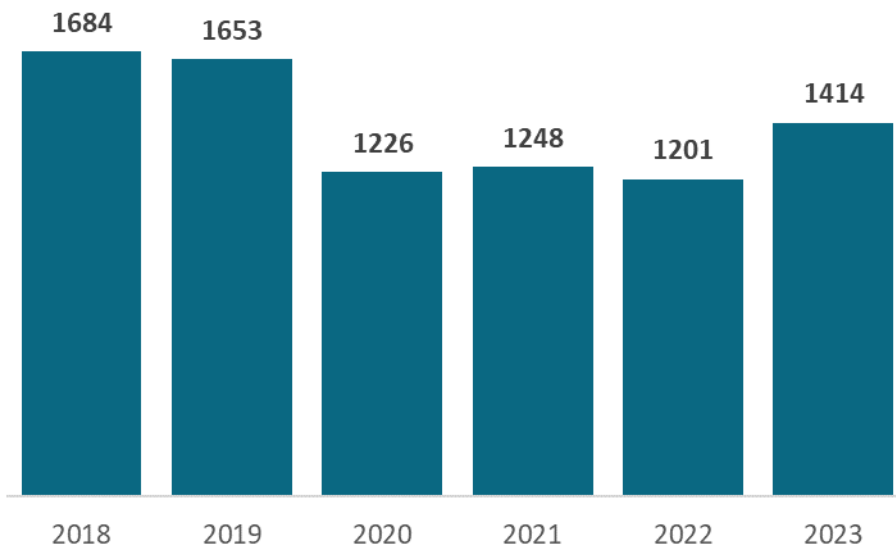
Alcohol-Related Traffic Stops

Drinking and driving is a serious issue in Wisconsin

If stopped by law enforcement for a DUI (driving under the influence), charges could include misdemeanors to felony offenses, and penalties for impaired driving can include driver's license revocation, fines, and jail time. It's also extremely expensive. A first-time offense can cost the driver upwards of \$10,000 in fines and legal fees. People that intend to drink while out should make a plan for a ride home, specifically from a non-drinking person.

The number of DUIs in Dane County decreased from 2019 to 2020 and has been mostly stable since, with a slight increase in 2023.

The impact of the pandemic in reducing people being social and drinking outside the home may be a factor in this trend.



Data source: Wisconsin Department of Justice

People drink and drive at all times of year

Drinking is not more prominent in a particular time or season of the year. DUI data shows that people in Dane County are drinking and driving year-round, with no particular pattern or trend. However, most DUIs are from 12pm-4am and typically on Friday and Saturdays.

Public Health works with police departments to track peoples' place of last drink (POLD)

In 2023, Public Health began collecting DUI data from multiple police department jurisdictions to assess trends in where the arrested person got their last drink. From this data, we can work with communities to reduce overserving and consumption, and prevent motor vehicle crashes including injury and death. Additionally, we can also look at blood and breath alcohol levels to understand how impaired drivers really are.



Motor Vehicle Crashes

Not everyone is affected equally by alcohol

Alcohol reduces the function of the brain, impairing thinking, reasoning, and muscle coordination. The higher the blood alcohol content (BAC) the more impaired a driver becomes.

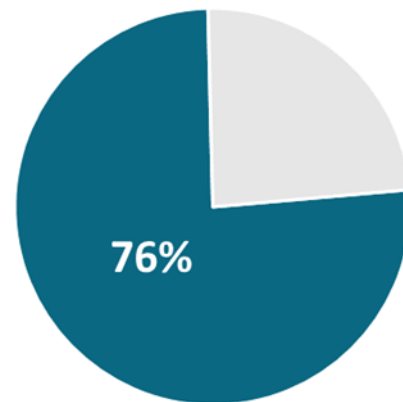
People can drink the same amount of alcohol and be at different levels of impairment. Many factors influence people's BAC, such as sex, weight, and body fat percentage. Learn more about BAC s on the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) website.

0.17

Average blood alcohol content in Dane County DUI stops in 2023 (over two times the legal limit of 0.08)

Date source: Various police department data in Dane County

76% of people stopped for a DUI in Dane County in 2023 were male.



Date source: Wisconsin Department of Justice

Dane County motor vehicle crashes

In Dane County from 2020-2022, alcohol was involved in:

- **5.3% of all motor vehicle crashes**
- **7.4% of all motor vehicle crashes with non-fatal injuries**
- **25.8% of all motor vehicle crashes with fatal injuries**

The pandemic has seemed to have influenced the percent of alcohol involved crashes, injuries and fatalities. While there were fewer crashes (and thus fewer injuries), the proportion of alcohol-related crashes, injuries and deaths increased. [According to the National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#), alcohol consumption increased more during the COVID-19 pandemic than in the last 50 years.

National youth impaired driving trends

The 2021 [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) found that among high school students nationally, during the past 30 days:

- 5% of drivers drove after drinking alcohol
- 14% rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol

Motor vehicle crashes are the [leading cause of death for teens](#) in the U.S., with a total of 1,885 young impaired drivers killed in 2020, according to [research](#) by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Within that category, 29% of drivers ages 15-20 who were killed in car crashes had been drinking. That's about 550 young drivers who died while driving drunk in 2020. The research found another 445 young drivers who crashed while drunk but survived.



Alcohol-Related Deaths

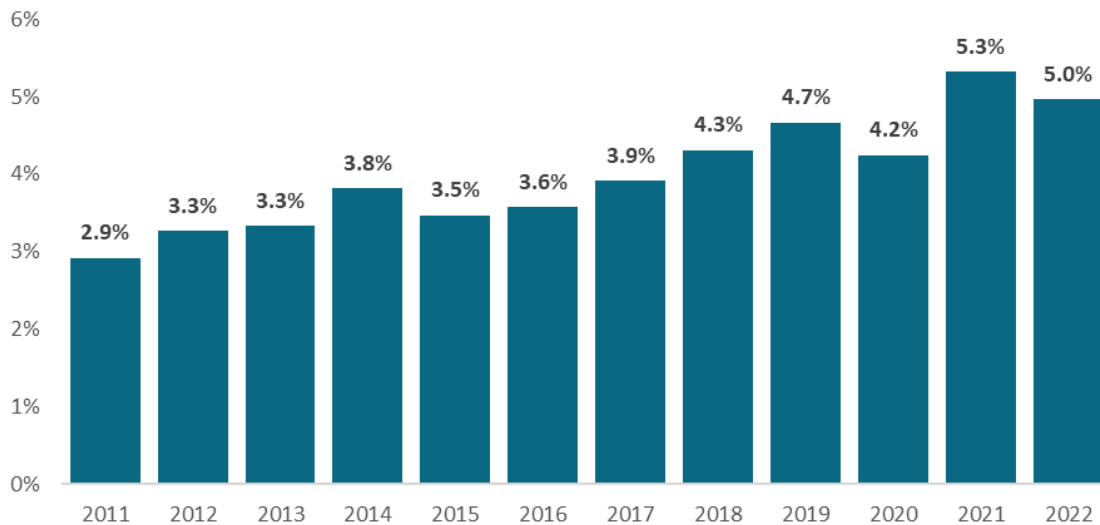
Alcohol causes more deaths than car accidents

When thinking about alcohol misuse, it's easy to think of the acute or immediate impacts, such as alcohol-related crashes, falls, poisoning from over-serving and consumption, and more.

However, it's important to think about the long-term effects of consuming alcohol across the course of one's life, and alcohol as a contributing factor in death. Excessive use of alcohol can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and liver disease. In addition, excessive alcohol use can lead to cancers of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, and colon.

Nationally, during the first two years of the pandemic, the number of death certificates listing alcohol as a factor soared from 78,927 to 108,791 — an increase of nearly 38%.

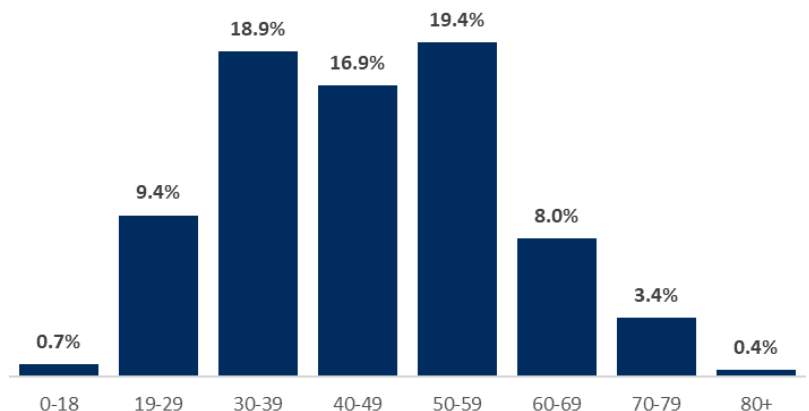
In Dane County, the percentage of all deaths with alcohol as a contributing factor rose from 2.9% in 2011 to 5% in 2022.



Data source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Office of Vital Records

In Dane County from 2020-2022, nearly 1 in 5 deaths among people ages 30-59 were alcohol-related.

Because many older adults died due to COVID-19, the percent of deaths among older adults due to alcohol may be a smaller proportion since 2020.



Data source: Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Office of Vital Records



Interventions and Policies to Improve Health

The Wisconsin State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (SCAODA) [issued a report](#) in 2021 to recommend evidence-based interventions and policies to reduce the burden of alcohol in Wisconsin.

The SCAODA report is set up based on who can change rules, regulations, or policies. Recommendations cover many aspects of alcohol in our lives:

1. **Modify the drinking environment.** Focused on reducing the acceptability of underage, heavy and binge drinking.
2. **Increase cost of alcohol.** Focused on the true cost of excessive alcohol use as well as evidenced-based recommendations to reduce youth consumption and lessen reducing heavy and binge drinking.
3. **Reduce promotion of alcohol to youth.** Focused on limiting attractiveness and advertising of alcohol to reduce youth consumption.
4. **Reduce availability of alcohol.**
5. **Support evidence-based alcohol education.** Focus includes evidenced-based policy and programming for educators and staff, K-12 education, higher education, and community groups.
6. **Engage in preventive health care.** Focused on reversing alcohol-related disease and death trends.
7. **Enact laws and regulations.** Focused on filling voids in the current alcohol regulatory system.
8. **Monitor and evaluate.** Focused on improving data collection systems.

It's pivotal that our community recognize the impacts of alcohol throughout a person's life, from immediate to long-term use by someone that chooses to use alcohol, to impacts felt by those that may not be the main consumer of alcohol. Conversations about prevention, use, harm reduction strategies, and policy will lead to a healthier community, one in which we can reduce the burden of alcohol on our families and friends.