

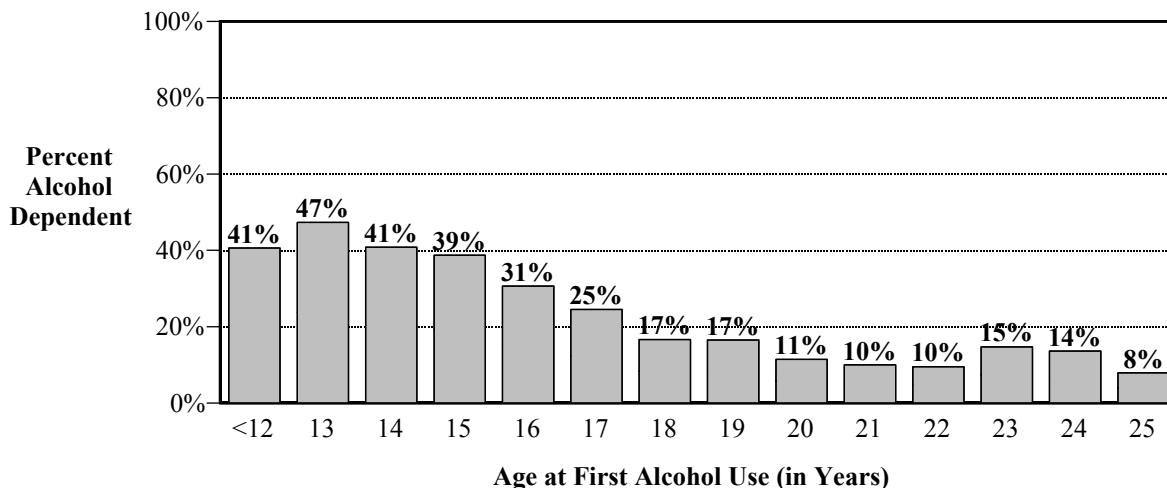
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Early Alcohol Users More than Three Times as Likely to Become Dependent

Early alcohol use is associated with higher rates of alcohol dependence, according to an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey (NLAES).^{*} Overall, 13% of adults were diagnosed with lifetime alcohol dependence (based on DSM-IV criteria). However, this figure changes dramatically when the age at first alcohol use (not counting small tastes or sips of alcohol) is taken into account. More than 40% of adults who began drinking before age 15 and 25% to 39% of adults who began drinking at ages 15 to 17 were later diagnosed as alcohol dependent. According to the authors, more research is necessary to “ascertain if it is the delay in alcohol use or, more likely, other associated factors that account for the inverse relationship between age at first drink and the risk of lifetime alcohol use disorders” (p. 109). For more information, contact Dr. Bridget Grant at 301-443-3306.

Percentage Diagnosed with Lifetime Alcohol Dependence, by Age at First Alcohol Use
(n=27,616)



^{*}The NLAES was a national household survey sponsored by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Face-to-face interviews were conducted in 1992 with respondents 18 years of age and older residing in the noninstitutionalized population of the contiguous United States, including the District of Columbia.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from Bridget F. Grant and Deborah A. Dawson, “Age at Onset of Alcohol Use and Its Association with DSM-IV Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey,” *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9:103-110, 1997.