

RESEARCH REPORT: **Alcohol initiation before age 15 predicts earlier hazardous drinking: A survival analysis of a 7-year prospective longitudinal cohort of Australian adolescents**

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**Abstract**

**Background and aims**

Early alcohol use may predict later alcohol problems, but the magnitude of this effect and impact of delayed onset remain uncertain. This study measured age-based differences in progression from first full alcoholic drink to hazardous drinking in one of the largest and most recent prospective cohorts of Australian adolescents.

**Design, settings, participants and measurement**

A 7-year (2012–19) prospective longitudinal cohort of 2082 Australian adolescents was established from the Climate and Preventure (cohort 1) and Climate Schools Combined (cohort 2) studies. Participants completed surveys annually from ages 13 to 20 years. Interval censored survival analyses were conducted with first episode of hazardous drinking [three or more on proxy Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C)] as the survival end-point, controlling for age, sex and mental health symptomatology. Onset of hazardous drinking was expressed as hazard ratios (HRs), and median survival time (years) was used to model first onset of hazardous alcohol use in survival curves.

**Findings:** Compared with those aged 15 or older, those who had their first full drink at 12 or younger had significantly elevated risk of hazardous drinking onset during the study period [log (HR): 9.3; 95% confidence interval (CI) = 7.0–12.0, *P* < 0.001]. Compared with those who had their first full drink at ages 13–14, those who delayed until 15 or older had significantly later onset of hazardous drinking; 1.63 years for males (95% CI = 1.31–1.92, *P* < 0.001) and 1.50 for females (95% CI = 1.15–1.81, *P* < 0.001), resulting in a median age of onset of hazardous drinking of > 19 for both sexes (male: 19.05 years, 95% CI = 18.74–19.38; female: 19.47 years, 95% CI = 19.19–19.75). First drink at ages 13–14 was associated with the earliest onset of hazardous drinking (males: 17.43 years; females: 17.98 years).

**Conclusions:** In Australia, alcohol initiation prior to age 15 appears to be associated with an earlier onset of hazardous drinking than initiation after age 15.

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