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French Report Shows Adolescent Alcohol Experimentation Rebounded After the Pandemic

More than half of students ages 11 to 15 said they had tried alcohol in 2024, the observatory found

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Alcohol use in France is continuing to move in two different directions, with regular drinking falling across much of the population while alcohol experimentation among adolescents is rising again after the pandemic period, according to a report released

Tuesday, November 24, by the French Observatory for Drugs and Addictive Trends, known as the OFDT.

The agency said more than half of middle school students ages 11 to 15, or 54%, reported having already consumed alcohol in 2024. Among high school students, the figure reached 72.7%. The data, drawn from the national EnCLASS school survey and included in the OFDT's annual review of alcohol use and its health and social effects, showed what the agency described as a statistically significant reversal in the trend for this measure of first use between 2022 and 2024.

The increase was strongest among younger students. The OFDT said the post-Covid rebound in alcohol experimentation reached 10.6 percentage points among middle school students and 4.4 points among high school students. In sixth grade alone, 37.5% of students said they had already consumed alcohol. The observatory said the share then rose steadily through the school years.

At the same time, the broader pattern of alcohol use in France continued to move downward, including among adults. According to the OFDT's review, daily alcohol consumption among adults fell to 7% in 2023, down from 10.6% in 2017. The report also said the longstanding French pattern of drinking wine every day with meals is losing ground.

Taken together, the figures point to a generational shift rather than a simple increase or decrease in alcohol use. The rise among adolescents concerns first exposure, not a return to the older model of routine daily drinking that public health authorities have tracked for decades in France. The decline in habitual adult consumption suggests that regular use is becoming less common, even as some younger people are trying alcohol earlier or more often than in the immediate post-pandemic years.

The OFDT's annual review combines several statistical sources. For the adolescent figures, it relied in part on EnCLASS, a national survey of middle and high school students on health and substance use that is carried out with support from France's education authorities, the School of Public Health and Public Health France. The observatory uses those data to monitor long-term changes in behavior and to identify emerging risks.

The findings are likely to draw attention from public health officials because early alcohol use is often treated as a warning sign, even when broader consumption patterns are declining. A rise in experimentation among students ages 11 to 18 means a larger share of minors has at least some exposure to alcohol, a development the OFDT singled out as a point requiring close monitoring.

The report also matters beyond health policy. For France’s beverage industry, especially wine producers, the fall in daily adult drinking adds to evidence that traditional consumption occasions are weakening. If that shift continues, it could affect demand forecasts, sales volumes and the balance between everyday consumption and more occasional purchases across wine, beer and spirits. The increase in adolescent experimentation does not offset that trend and cannot be read as a stable source of future demand, but it does show that alcohol remains present in youth behavior even as routine adult use declines.

France has long been associated with regular wine consumption, particularly at meals, but recent years have shown a steady change in that model. The OFDT’s latest figures suggest that this evolution is continuing, with fewer adults drinking every day and more of the country’s alcohol use concentrated outside older habits. At the same time, the rebound in adolescent experimentation shows that the retreat of traditional daily consumption has not removed alcohol from social life or from the experiences of younger age groups.

The contrast in the new data leaves policymakers facing two separate issues at once: how to interpret the continued decline in habitual alcohol use among adults, and how to prevent first exposure from spreading further among minors. The OFDT did not present those developments as contradictory, but as two parts of a changing national picture in which the old daily drinking culture is fading while early contact with alcohol remains a live concern.