

Information topic	Details
Indicator name	Prevalence of Heavy Episodic Drinking
Domain and topic	Alcohol-related harm – Harmful alcohol use
Indicator definition and units	Percentage of adults (aged 15 years and over) who self-report having six or more standard drinks on one occasion, with a frequency of ‘at least monthly’ and ‘at least weekly’.
Data Source	New Zealand Health Survey Regional data release Regional Data Release 2011/12–2023/24: New Zealand Health Survey Ministry of Health NZ
Numerator	The number of adults who answer the question “how often do you have six or more standard drinks on one occasion?”. If the response is ‘monthly’, ‘weekly’ or ‘daily or almost daily’ they are classed as ‘at least monthly’ heavy drinkers. If the response is ‘weekly’ or ‘daily or almost daily’ they are classed as ‘at least weekly’, drinkers.
Denominator	The adult (15+ years) population
Methodology	The estimates and confidence intervals are those reported by the New Zealand Health Survey. Responses to the survey are weighted to reflect each respondent’s probability of selection and calibrated so that the weighted sum of each population group matches their representation in the census. Furthermore, responses to each item are adjusted so that those who answer ‘refused’ or ‘don’t know’ do not bias the overall response. The results presented here are at DHB level which requires pooling of three years of the NZHS.
Time period and time scale	The NZHS has been continuous since 2011 and questions on heavy consumption of alcohol on a single occasion have been asked since 2016/17. The DHB level estimates are calculated by pooling the samples for the last three years of the NZHS as a rolling average. Estimates are reported for DHBs, health regions, regional councils, Iwi-Māori partnership boards and Geographical Classification of Health areas.
Population coverage	The target population of the NZHS is the ‘usually resident’ population including those living in non-private accommodation. The alcohol questions are asked to survey respondents 15 years and older. The survey population excludes most of those in non-private accommodation such as prisons, hospitals and dementia care units. Full details are in the NZHS methodology report (Ministry of Health, 2024b)
Spatial Coverage	The North and South Islands of New Zealand and Waiheke Island

Measures of frequency	Results are presented by District Health Board, sex, age group, ethnic group (Māori/non-Māori), and socioeconomic deprivation (NZDep quintiles) where possible
Limitations of indicator	There is no agreed definition of heavy episodic drinking and at what threshold it may cause harm. The question in the NZHS does not specify what ‘a single occasion’ is. There may be recall bias in individual’s self-reporting of consumption.
Limitations of data source	The non-response rate for the alcohol questionnaire is less than 3%. The overall adult response rate for the 2023/24 survey was 73%. The response rate for the NZHS fell to ~60% during the COVID period and has not yet recovered to the pre-COVID ~80%.
Related indicators	Hazardous Drinking
For more information	(Ministry of Health, 2020, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c)
References	Ministry of Health. (2020). Content Guide 2019/20: New Zealand Health Survey. Ministry of Health. https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2020-11/content-guide-2019-20-new-zealand-health-survey-nov20.pdf Ministry of Health. (2024a). Content Guide 2023/24: New Zealand Health Survey. M. o. Health. https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2024-11/content-guide-2023-24-new-zealand-health-survey-nov24.pdf Ministry of Health. (2024b). Methodology Report 2023/24: New Zealand Health Survey. M. o. Health. https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2024-11/methodology-report-2023-24-new-zealand-health-survey-nov24.pdf Ministry of Health. (2024c). New Zealand Health Survey Annual Data Explorer. Retrieved 28/10/2025 from https://minhealthnz.shinyapps.io/nz-health-survey-2023-24-annual-data-explorer/_w_7d7dfbf10426424c84f950977a1f1d66/#!/home