

Spring break: Study suggests how to reduce risky behavior

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(PhysOrg.com) -- College students who arrange with friends to "get their backs" are less likely to engage in risky spring break behavior, according to a new study.

The University of Michigan study, published this month in the [Journal of Youth and Adolescence](#), says about 60 percent of more than 650 college freshmen surveyed reported having an understanding with their friends about using [alcohol](#) during spring break.

Nearly 24 percent agreed with friends that they would get drunk and 18 percent agreed with friends not to get drunk. More than half the students said they had no understandings with friends about [sexual behavior](#), while about 16 percent said they had agreed with friends to use a condom if they had sex.

Men were significantly more likely than women to have understandings with friends to engage in risky behavior. For instance, more men than women reported having understandings that they would get drunk on break (29 percent of men compared to 18 percent of women), and four times as many men as women reported that they had an agreement with friends to have sex with someone new (9 percent compared 2 percent).

Women were more likely than men to report having understandings about safer behavior, such as agreeing not to get drunk (23 percent of women compared to 14 percent of men). About twice as many women as men reported agreements with friends not to have sex with someone new

during break (17 percent compared to 8 percent). However, men were more likely than women to have understandings to use condoms if they had sex (19 percent of men compared to 13 percent of women).

"Students who went on a spring break trip were nearly four times as likely as other students to engage in [binge drinking](#)," said developmental psychologist Megan Patrick, lead author of the paper and a Faculty Research Fellow at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (ISR). "Understandings students had with their friends were also important predictors of alcohol use and sexual behavior."

Patrick and colleagues at Penn State surveyed 651 college freshmen both before and after spring break. They were able to control for student behavior before spring break, which was a strong predictor of behavior during break.

According to the study, about 31 percent of 651 college freshmen surveyed reported binge drinking during spring break, and about nine percent reported having unprotected sex.

"It's important to encourage young people to talk with their [friends](#) about being safe during spring break," Patrick said. "Agreeing that they won't drink too much or have unprotected sex may have an important protective effect. It's also important to talk about looking out for each other in case someone does drink too much."

Provided by University of Michigan

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