

# Prohibition for French teenagers as new laws approved to curb 'le binge drinking'

- [Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris
- [The Guardian](#), Friday 13 March 2009

**It was once the nation of everything in moderation, where children learned to sip from parents' wine glasses at the dinner table and teenagers never got wasted in the street. But [France](#) is now battling such an epidemic of teenage binge-drinking that parliament this week approved new laws to curb alcohol sales to the young.**

The national assembly voted to ban so-called "open bars" which offer unlimited drinks for a fixed entry price. It raised the minimum age at which a person can buy alcohol and cigarettes from 16 to 18 in line with most of Europe, and banned the sale of alcohol at service stations between 6pm and 8am - thought to be a prime source of drinks for young people.

The law, which goes before the senate next week, would also allow mayors to ban takeaway sales of alcohol in their areas between 8pm and 8am.

**A newfound trend among French teenagers for overindulgence has seen a new Anglicism creep into the language: "le binge drinking". The number of minors under 15 hospitalised due to alcohol rose 50% between 2004 and 2007. A government report backing the new laws warned of "a worrying rise in massive alcohol use by young people".**

France, once the world's biggest wine-producer, now has a teetotal president and alcohol consumption that has steadily declined from 17.7 litres a head a year in 1961 to less than 9.3 litres today.

But teenage drinking is rising. France was shocked last year when two 16-year-old girls in Picardy fell into an alcoholic coma during their first morning lesson at school. At 8.15am they had got off the school bus, gone into a bar to celebrate a friend's birthday before class, and were served around 20 cherry-flavoured vodka drinks in half-an-hour.

The French health minister, Roselyne Bachelot, has called for a "reasonable, balanced approach" to alcohol, adding that France was a wine-producing nation and she liked a glass with dinner.

Whether young drinkers will be put off by tough new laws introduced as part of a health bill remains to be seen.

"I think that [the health minister] has put a finger in a grenade for which youths will pay dearly: she has created prohibition in France," said Bernard Quartier, president of the National Federation of cafes, brasseries and discotheques. "The street is going to become the premier bistro of France," he said.

The new bill could have been tougher but France's powerful vintners and wine lobby stepped in and secured amendments to protect against a dent in business. Wine-tastings and industry fairs were excluded from the ban on open bars and the government agreed to allow internet advertising of alcoholic drinks for the first time.