

STUDENT ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

REPORT IN SHORT

Alcohol and drug use among Canadian youth is an important issue. Research indicates that youth are not only more likely than adults to engage in risky substance use, but also to experience greater harm from that use¹. This can negatively impact their health, academic achievements, safety and, especially in the case of impaired driving, the lives of others. From 2000 to 2007, 47% of all drivers 19 years of age or younger who died in traffic fatalities tested positive for either alcohol and/or drugs².

To develop a national picture of the scope of the problem, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), in tandem with provincial health and addictions organizations in nine provinces, developed the *Cross Canada Report on Student Alcohol and Drug Use*. The report combines data from the various regularly occurring provincial student alcohol and drug use surveys³ as well as data collected nationally by the Youth Smoking Survey⁴. This represents the first time data from these varied sources have been brought together in a single report permitting the identification of national patterns of student substance use. It is hoped that a greater understanding of these national patterns will enable policy makers, researchers, and health care, prevention and treatment professionals to develop more appropriate, effective responses to student alcohol and drug use in Canada.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings were based on data collected during 2007-2008 for students in grades 7, 9, 10 and 12 (i.e., youth approximately 12-18 years old). Of particular note was the remarkable consistency across all jurisdictions of substance use estimates by gender and grade. Key findings include:

- a significant increase in prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use from grade 7 to grade 12. For example, in grade 7, depending on the province, 3% to 8% report past-year cannabis use versus 30% to 53% among their grade 12 counterparts.
- alcohol use in the past year is about twice as prevalent as cannabis use for all grades combined (46% to 62%) versus (17% to 32%) respectively.
- 19% to 30% of all students report consuming five or more drinks on one occasion in the past month. When examining 12th graders alone approximately half (41% to 55%) report consuming five or more drinks on one occasion.

¹ Adlaf, E. M., Begin, P., & Sawka, E. (2005). Canadian addiction survey (CAS): A national survey of Canadians' use of alcohol and other drugs: Prevalence of use and related harms: Detailed report. Ottawa: Canadian centre on substance abuse.

² Beasley, E.E., Beirness, D.J., & Porath-Waller, A. J. (2011). A Comparison of Drug- and Alcohol-involved Motor Vehicle Driver Fatalities. Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

³ The surveys contributing data to this report include: The BC Adolescent Health Survey, The Alberta Youth Experience Survey, The Manitoba Student Alcohol and Drug Use Survey, The Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, The Québec Survey on Tobacco, Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling in High School Students, and the Student Drug Use Survey in the Atlantic Provinces.

⁴ Health Canada. 2008-2009 Youth Smoking Survey (YSS). 2010. Available at: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/tobac-tabac/research-recherche/stat/index-eng.php#yys>

- 2–5% report using cannabis daily or almost daily.
- 12% to 20% of grade 12 students report having driven in the past year within an hour after drinking.
- 14% to 21% of all grade 12 students report having driven within an hour of using cannabis and over 33% of all grade 12 students report they have been a passenger with someone who had used cannabis.
- There are few gender differences in alcohol or cannabis use. However, more males report drinking and consuming cannabis before driving.
- Among the drugs assessed by the surveys, aside from alcohol and cannabis, ecstasy is the most prevalent drug (between 4% to 7% report lifetime use) followed by inhalants (approximately 2% to 4% report lifetime use).

THE IMPLICATIONS

The prevalence of alcohol and drug use among 7th graders is relatively low. However, use increases dramatically by 12th grade. These findings emphasize the importance of targeted prevention and should be taken into consideration to appropriately tailor prevention efforts. Prevention efforts aimed at deterring or delaying the onset of use may be most appropriately directed at those in their early years of high school, whereas prevention aimed at reducing frequency of use or the occurrence of specific activities, such as driving following use may be more appropriately aimed at those in their final years of high-school.

The incidence of youth alcohol and cannabis use and driving highlighted by this report is also concerning. The potential harm to youth, their friends, and other road users is great. The consistency of this finding across provinces lends strong support to the need for a national drug impaired driving prevention campaign aimed at youth. Based on the findings, such a campaign may consider including targeted prevention messages aimed at young male drivers.

It is equally important to underline that although 8% to 28% of grade 7 students in Canada report drinking alcohol in the past year, this also means that the vast majority of Grade 7 students (72% to 92%) don't drink. Knowing this may delay the onset of use due to perceived social norms. Similarly, the majority of students in grades 7, 9 and 10 report never having used cannabis. Sharing these facts widely with appropriate age groups is recommended as making youth aware that the majority of their peers are not using alcohol or other drugs may influence their decisions whether or not to use these substances⁵.

MORE INFORMATION

This Report in Short is based on a full technical report entitled *Cross-Canada Report on Student Alcohol and Drug Use*⁶. The full report is available on the CCSA website at: <http://www.ccsa.ca/Eng/Priorities/Research/StudentDrugUse/Pages/default.aspx>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CCSA wishes to thank the members of the Student Drug Use Surveys Working Group (in alphabetical order): Brent Anderson (Addictions Management Unit, Manitoba Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors), Angela Boak (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Ontario), Heather Clark (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse), Yvette Doiron (Addictions, Mental Health and Primary Health Care Division, New Brunswick), Jesse Jahrig (Alberta Health Services), Patrick Laprise and Lucille Pica (Institut de la statistique du Québec), Elizabeth Saewyc, Ph.D. (University of British Columbia School of Nursing & McCreary Centre Society, British Columbia), Stacy Taylor (New Brunswick Department of Health).

CCSA would also like to thank Matthew Dann, Jillian Flight and Mark Latendresse of the Office Research and Surveillance, Controlled Substances and Tobacco Directorate, Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch of Health Canada for contributing the Youth Smoking Survey data and attending working group meetings in an observer/advisory capacity.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies or positions of the above-mentioned organizations.

ABOUT CCSA

With a legislated mandate to reduce alcohol- and other drug-related harms, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse provides leadership on national priorities, fosters knowledge-exchange within the field, and creates sustainable partnerships that maximize collective efforts. CCSA receives funding support from Health Canada. The views expressed by CCSA do not necessarily reflect the views of Health Canada. Learn more at www.ccsa.ca



Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

75 Albert Street, Suite 500
Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7

Phone: (613) 235-4048

Fax: (613) 235-8101

Email: info@ccsa.ca

⁵ Mattern, J. L., & Neighbors, C. (2004). Social Norms Campaigns: Examining the Relationship between Changes in Perceived Norms and Changes in Drinking Levels. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 65(4), 489-493. Perkins, H. W., & Craig, D. W. (2006). A successful social norms campaign to reduce alcohol misuse among college student-athletes. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 67(6), 880-889.

⁶ Young, M. M., Saewyc, E., Boak, A., Jahrig, J., Anderson, B., Doiron-Brun, Y., Taylor, S., Pica, L., Laprise, P., and Clark, H. (Student Drug Use Surveys Working Group). (2011). *The Cross Canada Report on Student Drug Use*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.