

Marijuana and Other Illicit Drug Use

The use of illegal drugs generally declined in 2003, especially among 11th graders. Use of specific drugs leveled off in 2005, although there were some slight declines for upper grades vs. similarly slight increases in 7th grade. Nevertheless, overall illegal drug use increased in grades 9 and 11, probable due to addition of an item on a new class of drugs. Marijuana remains the most popular drug after alcohol, the closest rival being inhalants in 7th grade. Even among 11th graders, the lifetime prevalence rates for other specific drugs do not exceed 10%, with the notable exception of prescription painkillers. Lifetime use of any drug other than marijuana was 12% in 7th grade, rising to 26% in 11th grade.

Overall Prevalence of Use

Any Drug Use. Lifetime use of any drug increased 2-3 points to 16% in 7th grade, 30% in 9th, and 45% in 11th. Similarly, any drug use in the past six months rose to 14%, 26%, and 38%, respectively. These increases likely are due to the addition of prescription painkillers to the survey. Any current drug use (past 30 days), which did not include painkillers, was more stable, increasing 2 points to 8% in 7th grade, but remaining level at 15% and 22% in 9th/11th. Moreover, use of most individual drugs did not increase.

Marijuana Use. Among 7th graders, use of marijuana was stable, as it has been since 1999 or 2001 (depending on measure), at 8% lifetime, 6-7% for six-month use, and 4-5% current use. Among 9th graders, lifetime use was down slightly at 22%, compared to 24% in 2001. Thirty-day and six-month rates have been stable since 1999 at 13% and 19%, respectively. After declining in 2003, marijuana use among 11th graders stabilized at 38% for lifetime, 30% for past six months, and 19% past thirty days.

Inhalant Use. After marijuana, the most commonly used drug overall is the wide range of substances known as inhalants (such as glue, paint, gasoline, poppers, or gases). This class of drugs is almost stable across grade levels. Among 7th graders, inhalant use equals marijuana, and accounts for the great majority of all other drug use, probably because inhalants are so readily available at an early age. For 2005, there was a very marginal upward trend. Lifetime and current use of inhalants increased by two points to 8% and 5%, respectively. Six-month use rose by only one point to 9%. Among 9th/11th graders, inhalant use was more stable and differed little by grade. Lifetime use held at 10%; six-month use held at 8% and 7%; and current use at 5% and 4%.

Prescription Painkillers. In a new question, non-medical lifetime use of prescription painkillers such as OxyContin and Percodan was reported by only 4% of 7th graders, but

the percentages rose to 9% in 9th and 15% in 11th grades. In 7th and 9th, this was the category of drugs most commonly used after marijuana and inhalants; in 11th grade, it was second to marijuana. Use in the past six months was similarly at 9% in 9th grade and 14% in 11th. Compared to the total sample, users of painkillers were three or more times more likely to be weekly marijuana users in 9th grade and 2.5-3 times more in 11th; been high seven or more times; like to get very high on drugs, and be identified as High-Risk Drug Users (see below).

Ecstasy, LSD, and Psychedelics. Among 9th/11th graders, use of ecstasy was stable at 4-6% for lifetime and past six-months. Use of LSD or other psychedelics was level at 3-4%. These measures had generally declined in 2003.

Methamphetamine and Cocaine. High school students reported similar rates for both methamphetamine and cocaine, with little change from 2003 or 2001. For 11th grade, lifetime use was around 7% and current use at 4%.

Table 3.1. Overall Prevalence of Drug Use in the Past 30 Days and Lifetime

	Grade		
	7 th (%)	9 th (%)	11 th (%)
Lifetime Any Drug	16	30	45
Marijuana	8	22	38
Inhalants	8	10	10
Painkillers	4	9	15
Methamphetamine	2	4	7
Ecstasy	1	4	6
LSD/psychedelics	2	3	4
Current (Past 30 Days) Any Drug	8	15	22
Marijuana	5	13	19
Inhalants	5	5	4
Methamphetamine	—	3	4

Heavy Use Measures

Frequent Marijuana Use. Use of marijuana *at least once a week* over the past six months held among 9th and 11th graders at 6% and 10%, the same as in 2003 (and 2001 for 9th). Although these are lower weekly rates than for alcohol, weekly users are about one-quarter of the marijuana-using population, a higher proportion than found for alcohol. Use of marijuana in three or more of the past

30 days, suggesting weekly use, was also unchanged in 9th at 7%, but it did decline two points in 11th grade to 11%, and it has declined four points since 2001. *These regular users account for the majority of all current marijuana users in the upper grades.*

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Daily marijuana use (current and past six months) was negligible in grade 9 but reached 4% in 11th, exceeding daily alcohol drinking by three points.

Getting High. The percentages for being “high” or loaded on drugs remained at 7%, 20%, and 36%, across grades, the same as in 2003. Although fewer 9th and 11th graders use drugs than alcohol, the prevalence rates for being high/loaded on drugs were slightly higher than those for being very drunk/sick on alcohol. Furthermore, 9% of 9th graders and 17% of 11th were high on drugs seven or more times, twice the percentages for alcohol (3% and 8%). Twelve percent of 9th and 23% of 11th graders reported they used drugs to get moderately-to-very high. About half of them (6% and 11%) selected very high, unchanged from 2003 and higher than the percentages reporting liking to get “really drunk.” More than for alcohol, students appear to use drugs to get high.

Use at School. Use of marijuana on school property (past 30 days) was reported by 7% of upper graders, about the

same as for alcohol. This behavior indicates willingness to take risks to use and likely serious involvement.

High-Risk Use (HRU). Students reporting a high frequency or level of drug use in the past six months were classified as High-Risk Drug Users (HRU). The percentage rose two points in 9th grade to 11% and remained level in 11th at 17%. The increase in 9th grade may again reflect the survey’s addition of prescription painkillers.

Table 3.2. Heavy Drug Use Indicators

	Grade		
	7 th (%)	9 th (%)	11 th (%)
Weekly marijuana use, past 6 months	2	6	10
Marijuana use in 3 of past 30 days	2	7	11
Ever high/loaded on drugs	7	20	36
3 or more times	3	12	25
Likes to get very high	—	6	11
Used marijuana in school, past 30 days	3	7	7
High-Risk Drug Use	4	11	17

Problems Stemming from Use and Efforts at Cessation

Problem Experiences. Asked to identify which of 12 potential pharmacological, personal, school, and social problems they experienced from use of marijuana and other drugs, 11% of 9th graders and 18% of 11th reported *one or more problems* and 5% and 8% reported *two or more problems*. Although lower rates than for alcohol,

they are just as troubling because of the smaller size of the drug-using population.

Cessation Efforts. At least one attempt to stop marijuana use was reported by 11% of 9th and 17% of 11th graders, about half of the total marijuana-using population. These are higher rates than for alcohol in 11th grade.

Perceived Harm and Availability

The percentage reporting marijuana is *very easy to obtain* was only 10% in 7th grade, but rose to 48% in 11th, about the same as in 2003. Fully 71% of 11th graders believed it was *very or fairly easy* to obtain. These percentages are similar or even lower than found for alcohol. *Older adolescents see very little difference between the availability of licit and illicit substances (for adults) like alcohol.*

The percentages perceiving *harm* from *occasional marijuana* use fell by over half across grades, from 65% in 7th to 31% in 11th, to about double the percentages for alcohol. For *inhalants* in 7th grade, and *methamphetamine* and *ecstasy* in the upper grades, extremely-harmful percentages were much higher and similar across grades, at about two-thirds (65-71%).

Conclusions

In 2001, we noted that nearly half of 11th graders had ever tried at least one drug, reaching normative behavior in a statistical sense. This is still close to being true (at 45%) and the leveling off of the previous declining trend warns against complacency. Equally unsettling are the new data on the use of prescription painkillers, confirming anecdotal reports of rising use of OxyContin and similar drugs. Most disconcerting is the continued indication that about one-in-ten 11th graders may have a serious drug-use problem – since they report experiencing two or more drug-related problems, weekly marijuana use, current marijuana use at school, and liking to get very high on drugs. That about half of marijuana users in 11th grade have made at least one effort to stop use suggests targeting intervention efforts such as *Student Assistance Programs* at these students may be successful in bringing about future declines in use.

About the CSS

The state-mandated 11th biennial California Student Survey was conducted in the fall-winter of the 2005-06 school year by WestEd under conditions of strict confidentiality and anonymity among 10,638 students in grades 7, 9 and 11 in 113 randomly-selected schools. Participation was voluntary and required parental approval. The survey is sponsored by the Office of the Attorney General, with the California Dept. of Education and Dept. of Alcohol and Drug Programs. Full results are online at www.Safestate.org/CSS.