



## Fact Sheet on

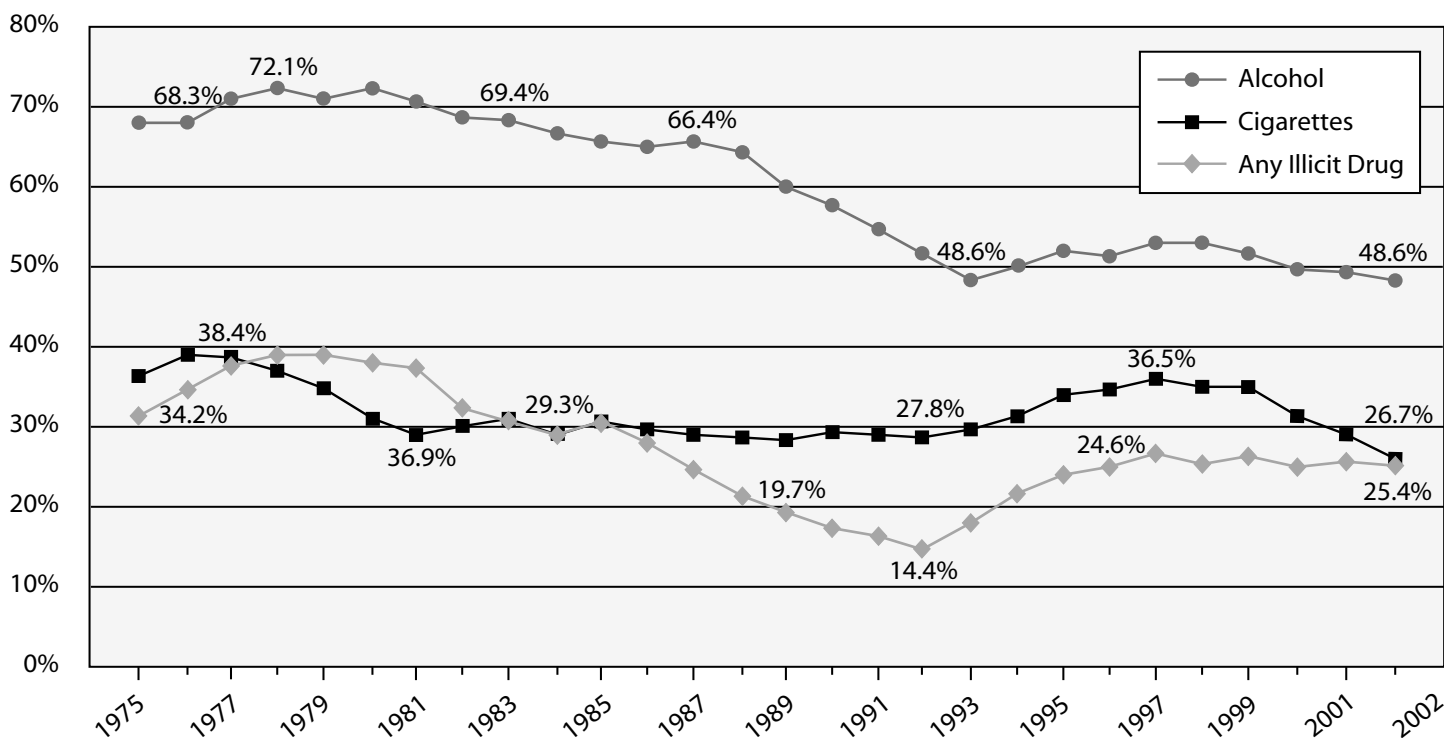
# Substance Use: Adolescents & Young Adults

### Highlights:

- ▶ Substance use has declined or stabilized since the mid-1990s.
- ▶ One in five 12th graders smokes cigarettes daily.
- ▶ About half of White and Hispanic 12th graders used alcohol in the past thirty days.
- ▶ Marijuana is the most widely-used illicit drug among adolescents.
- ▶ Initiation of substance use most often occurs between grades 7 and 10.

- ▶ Substance use has declined or stabilized since the mid-1990s.

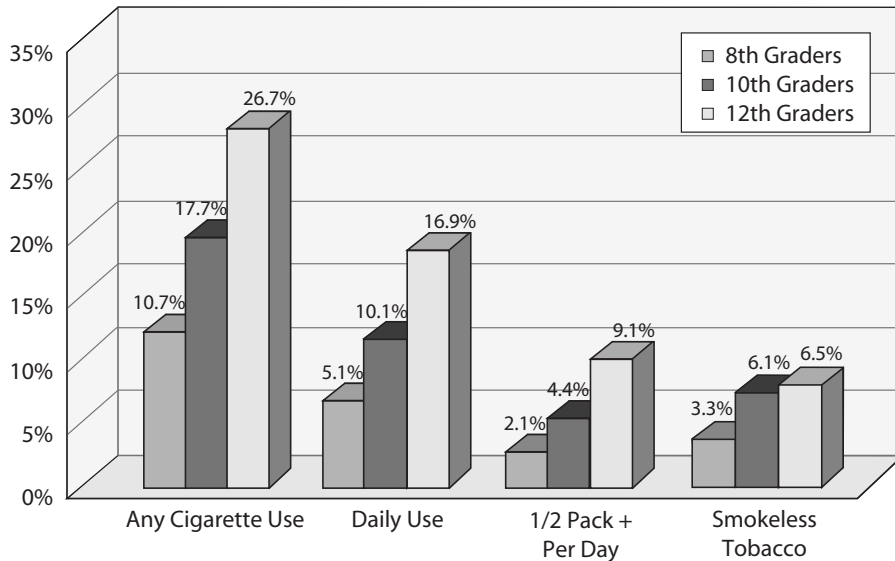
Trends in Past Thirty-Day Substance Use Among 12th Graders, 1975-2002



Past thirty-day substance use among 12th graders increased in the early 1990s, after a steady decline in use of alcohol and illicit drugs, and small decreases in cigarette use since 1975. However, use of alcohol and cigarettes decreased again in the late 1990s, while the level of illicit drug use remained stable. In 2002, alcohol remained by far the most commonly used substance: 48.6% of 12th graders reported use within the past 30 days, compared to 26.7% for cigarettes, and 25.4% for any illicit drug (Johnston et al., 2002; MTF, 2002).

► **One in five 12th graders smokes cigarettes daily.**

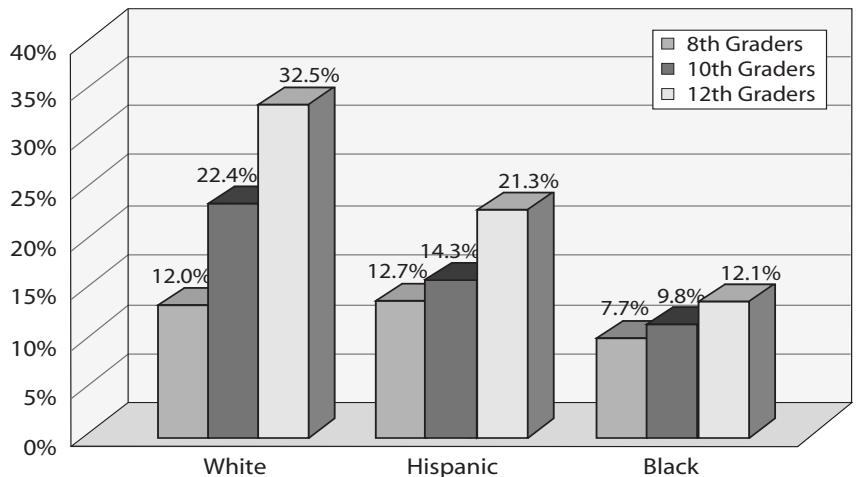
Patterns of Past Thirty-Day Tobacco Use by Grade Level, 2002



The percentage of students who report smoking cigarettes in the past thirty days more than doubles between 8th and 12th grade. In 2002, about one in five 12th graders reported daily smoking, compared to one in ten 10th graders and one in twenty 8th graders. Almost one-third of 12th graders who report past 30-day use smoke half-a-pack or more daily. Cigarette use among males and females is similar at all grade levels. However, 12th grade males are about ten times more likely than females to use smokeless tobacco (12.2% vs. 1.2%) (data not shown) (MTF, 2002).

► **Over one-third of White 12th graders smoked in the past thirty days.**

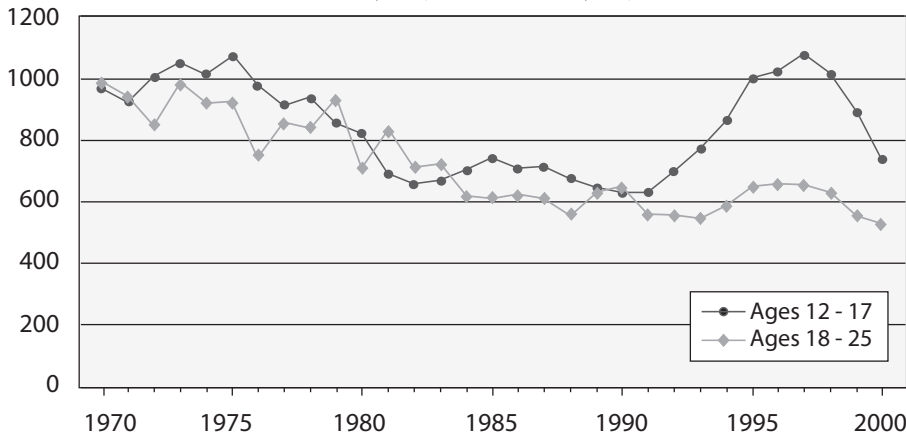
Past Thirty-Day Cigarette Use by Race/Ethnicity and Grade Level, 2002



In 2002, 32.5% of White 12th graders reported using cigarettes in the past month, a figure 1.5-3 times that of same-age Hispanics and Blacks (21.3% and 12.1%, respectively) (MTF, 2002). Race/ethnicity data available from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA)<sup>1</sup> show that among 12-17 year-olds, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth were most likely to report having smoked within the past month, and Black youth were least likely to smoke (SAMHSA, 2002).

► **The number of new daily smokers has decreased among adolescents and young adults.**

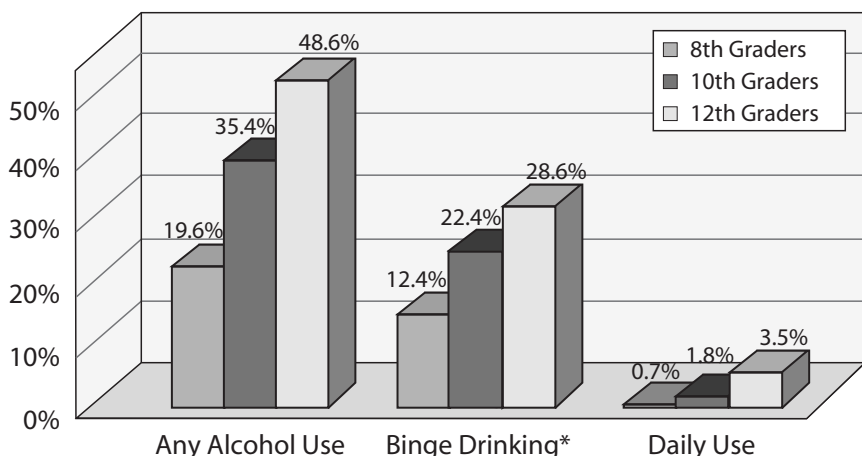
Initiation of Daily Cigarette Use by Age, 1970-2000



Initiation of daily smoking among adolescents ages 12-17 increased dramatically between 1991 and 1997, after almost a decade of decline. Use declined in the late 1990s, with the number of new daily smokers dropping from 1.1 million in 1997 to 747,000 in 2000. The number of young adult initiates has declined overall during the past three decades, and is at a historic low (SAMHSA, 2002). A recent study found that 95% of youth ages 12-17 who smoke tried their first cigarette by age 15 (CASA, 2002).

▶ **Thirty percent of twelfth graders report binge drinking over a two-week period.**

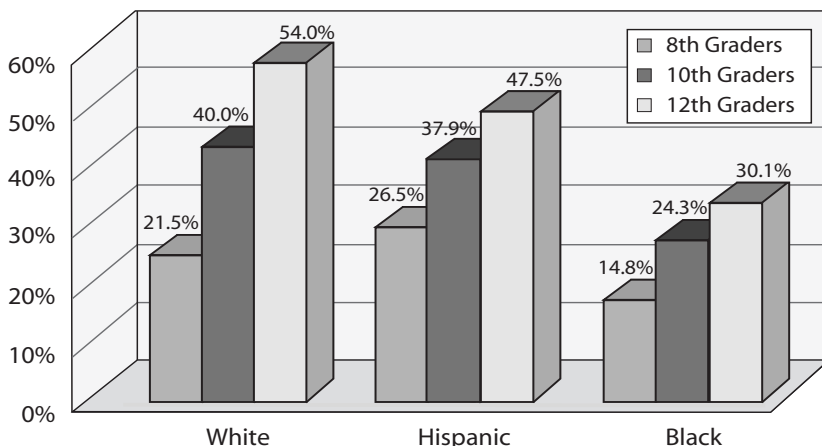
Patterns of Alcohol Use by Grade Level, 2002



Half of 12th graders reported using alcohol during the last thirty days in 2002. About 30% of 12th graders reported binge drinking within the last two weeks. This suggests that at least three out of five 12th graders who use alcohol are binge drinkers. Although alcohol use was much lower for 8th graders, 12.4% reported binge drinking. Gender differences in binge drinking increase with age, with 12th grade males more likely to binge drink than females (34.2% vs. 23.0%) (data not shown) (MTF, 2002).

▶ **About half of White and Hispanic 12th graders used alcohol in the past thirty days.**

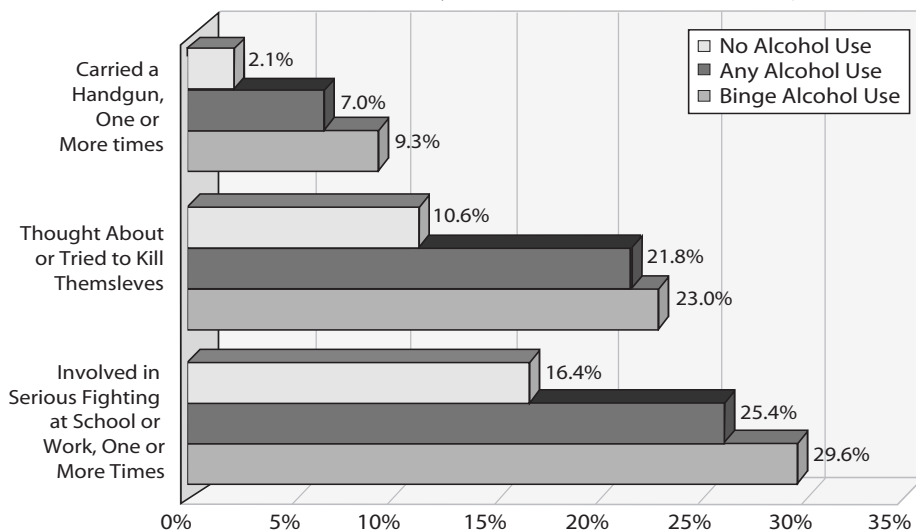
Past Thirty-Day Alcohol Use by Race/Ethnicity and Grade Level, 2002



White and Hispanic 12th graders are more likely to report using alcohol than their Black peers (MTF, 2002). Data from the 2001 NHSDA<sup>1</sup> show alcohol use for youth ages 12-17 is most prevalent among AI/AN youth and least prevalent among Black youth (SAMHSA, 2002). Data from 2002 show that the gender difference in alcohol use increases with age: among 8th graders, males are slightly more likely to drink than females (20.0% vs. 19.1%), but among 12th graders, there is a larger gap in use between males and females (52.3% vs. 45.1%) (data not shown) (MTF, 2002).

▶ **Almost one in ten adolescents who use alcohol also reported carrying a handgun.**

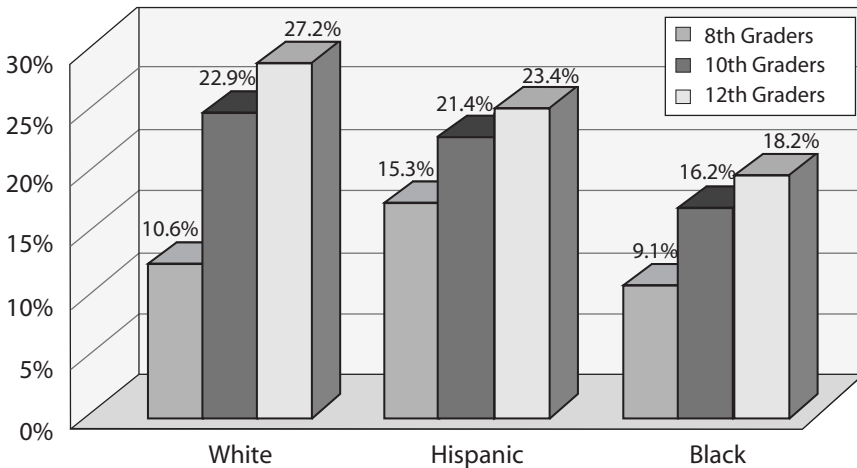
Past-Year Health Risks by Past-Month Alcohol Use, Ages 12-17, 2000



Adolescents who used alcohol in the past month were three times more likely to carry a handgun in the past year than their peers who did not use alcohol. Alcohol use is highly associated with other risky behaviors, including fighting and thinking about or trying to commit suicide. Additionally, between 1999 and 2000, 20% of young adults ages 18-25 reported driving under the influence of alcohol, and 10.7% reported driving under the influence of any illicit drug (SAMHSA, 2001; OAS, 2002).

► **Illicit drug use among adolescents varies slightly for most racial/ethnic groups.**

Past Thirty-Day Illicit Drug Use by Race/Ethnicity and Grade Level, 2002

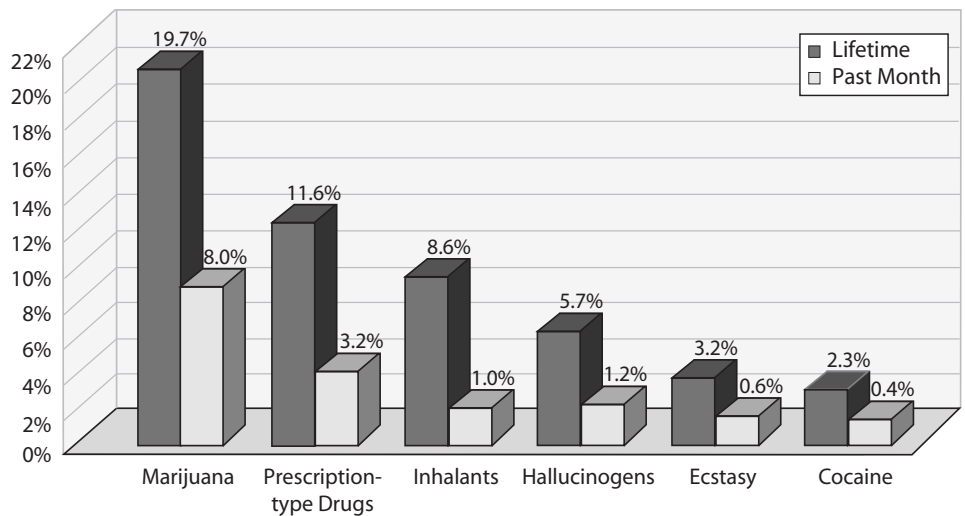


Illicit drug use is strikingly similar when comparing adolescents by race/ethnicity and grade level. White and Hispanic students have slightly higher prevalence than Black students overall (MTF, 2002). 2001 NHSDA<sup>1</sup> data show that AI/AN youth have the highest prevalence of illicit drug use, and Asian youth have the lowest prevalence (SAMHSA, 2002). In 2002, twelfth grade males used illicit drugs slightly more than same-age females (28.5% vs. 21.8%) (data not shown) (MTF, 2002). Over a quarter of high school students reported that they were offered, sold or given an illegal drug on school property (Grunbaum et al., 2002).

► **Marijuana is the most widely-used illicit drug among adolescents.**

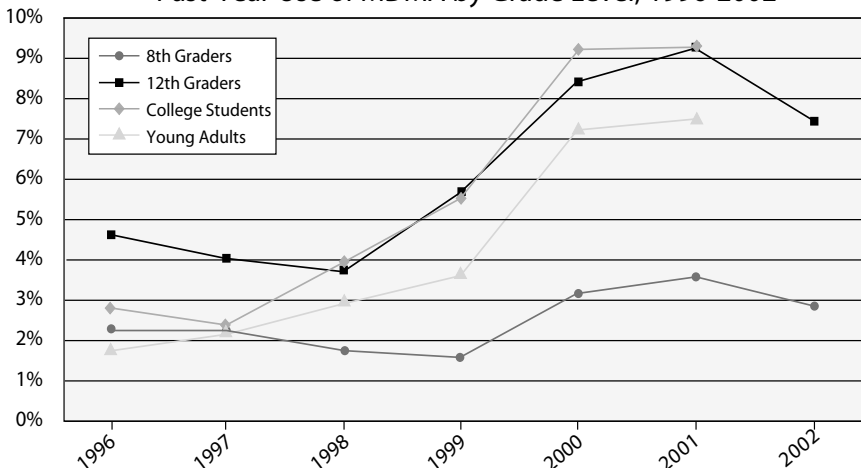
Most Commonly Used Illicit Substances by Frequency of Use, Ages 12-17, 2002

Marijuana is the illicit drug most likely to be used by adolescents. In 2001, 8.0% of youth ages 12-17 reported using marijuana within the past month. Prescription-type drugs (non-medical use) were the next most commonly used, with 3.2% reporting past-month use. Pain relievers account for most of this usage. Lifetime use is significantly higher than current use for all illicit substances (SAMHSA, 2002). Among 8th, 10th and 12th graders, marijuana use was 2-8% higher among males than females in 2002 (data not shown) (MTF, 2002).



► **The use of MDMA/Ecstasy has increased dramatically in the past few years.**

Past-Year Use of MDMA by Grade Level, 1996-2002

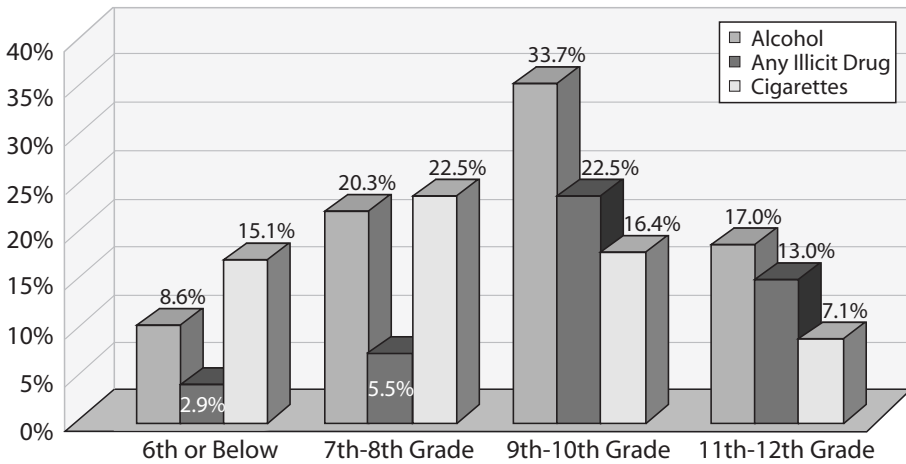


2002 data for Past-Year MDMA Use is currently not available for College Students and Young Adults. Data will be available in Fall 2003 on the Monitoring the Future web site.

Between 1996 and 2002, past-year use of methylenedioxy-methylamphetamin (MDMA, or "Ecstasy") increased among adolescents and young adults<sup>2</sup>. This rise has been most dramatic among older adolescents. Reported use from 1996-2001 doubled among 12th graders (from 4.6% to 9.2%), and more than tripled among college students (from 2.8% to 9.2%). However, 2002 data show a decrease in MDMA use among 8th and 12th graders (7.4% & 2.9%, respectively). White (8.5%) and Hispanic (7.0%) 12th graders are more likely to report MDMA use than their Black peers (1.7%). Twelfth grade males and females report similar levels of MDMA use (8.2% vs. 6.4%) (data not shown) (MTF, 2002).

► **Initiation of substance use most often occurs between grades 7 and 10.**

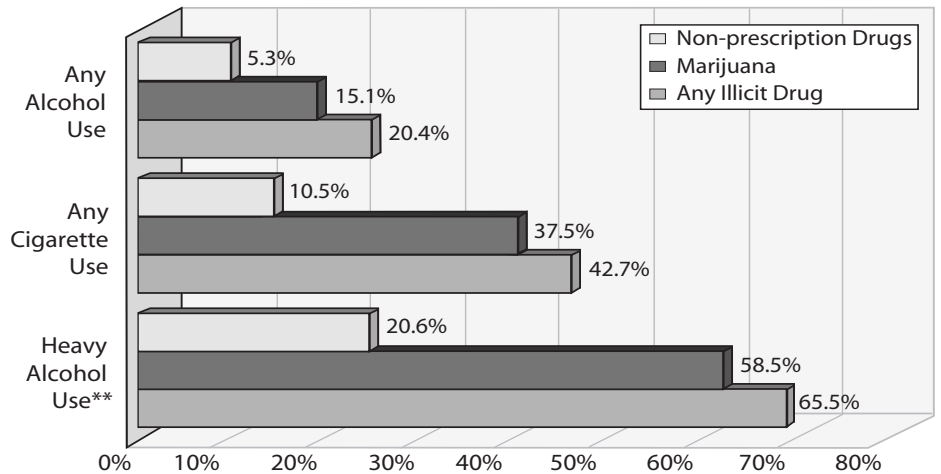
Initiation of Substance Use by Grade & Substance, 12th Graders, 2001



In 2001, 12th graders most frequently reported initiating substance use between the 7th and 10th grades. Alcohol and illicit drug use were most likely to begin in 9th grade, while cigarettes were most often first tried in 7th or 8th grade. Trend data show little change in age of initiation over the past decade (Johnston et al., 2002). According to a 2002 survey among youth ages 12-17, the average age of first use is 12 for cigarettes, 12.5 for alcohol and 13.5 for marijuana (CASA, 2002).

► **Almost seven out of ten past-month heavy drinkers also use an illicit drug.**

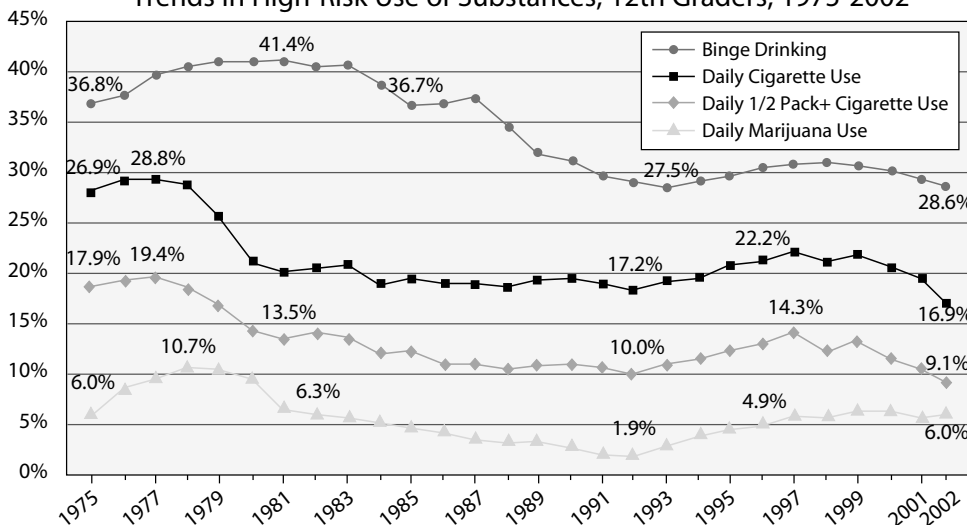
Past-Month Illicit Drug Use Among Past-Month Alcohol and Cigarette Users, 12-17, 2000



In 2000, almost two-thirds of past-month heavy drinkers ages 12-17 (2.6% of this age group) also used an illicit drug. One in five of all past-month alcohol users (16.4% of this age group) were also illicit drug users. Among non-drinkers, only 4.2% used illicit drugs in the past month. Over 40% of past-month smokers used an illicit drug, but less than 5% of non-smokers used any illicit drugs and less than 3% used marijuana (SAMHSA, 2001).

► **Daily 1/2 Pack+ cigarette use decreased the most among the common high-risk uses of substances by adolescents.**

Trends in High-Risk Use of Substances, 12th Graders, 1975-2002



Over the past 25 years, binge drinking, daily cigarette use, and daily use of half-a-pack or more of cigarettes has declined among 12th graders, with daily half-a-pack use decreasing the most (97%). Daily marijuana use has not changed between 1975 and 2002. However, there is still a high prevalence of high-risk substance use: 3 out of 10 twelfth graders are binge drinkers, 1 out of 6 are daily smokers, and 1 in 11 smoke half a pack or more daily (Johnston et al., 2002; MTF, 2002).

**Data Sources:**

Grunbaum, J.A, Kann, L., Kinchen, S.A., Williams, B., Ross, J.G., Lowry, R., et al. (2002). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance-United States, 2001*. In: Surveillance Summaries, June 28, 2002. MMWR, 51(No.SS-4). [URL (10/02): <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/ss/ss5104.pdf>]

Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., & Bachman, J.G. (2002). *Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2001*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse. [URL (10/02): [http://monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/vol1\\_2001.pdf](http://monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/vol1_2001.pdf)]

Monitoring the Future [MTF] (2002). *2002 Data From In-School Surveys of 8th, 10th and 12th Grade Students*. (Tables & Private Data Run.) [URL (12/02): <http://monitoringthefuture.org/data.html#2002data-drugs>]

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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]. (2001). *Summary of Findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse*. Rockville, MD: Office of Applied Studies, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [URL (10/02): <http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda.htm#NHSDAinfo>]

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]. (2002). *Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volumes 1 & 2, Summary of National Findings*. Rockville, MD: Office of Applied Studies. [URL (10/02): <http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda.htm#NHSDAinfo>]

**Text Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse [NHSDA] reports lower levels of use than the Monitoring the Future [MTF] survey. This may be due to more under-reporting in the household setting as compared with the school setting. MTF collects data for Whites, Blacks and Hispanics. NHSDA categorizes data by Hispanics overall and non-Hispanics for each racial group - White, Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, More than one race (SAMHSA, 2002; Johnston et al., 2002; MTF, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> The Previous graph may underestimate Ecstasy use due to NHSDA's different survey methodology; see note 1 (SAMHSA, 2002).

**Graph Notes:**

\* Binge drinking is defined as consuming 5 or more drinks in a row on one or more occasions over the past two weeks (Johnston et al., 2002; MTF, 2002).

\*\* Heavy alcohol use is defined as consuming 5 or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days. Heavy alcohol users are also binge alcohol users (SAMHSA, 2002).

In all cases, the most recent available data were used. Some data are released 1-3 years after collection. For questions regarding data sources or availability, please contact NAHIC. For racial/ethnic data, the category names presented are those of the data sources used. Every attempt was made to standardize age ranges, when this was not possible, age ranges are those of the data sources used.

**NAHIC Fact Sheets**

- Fact Sheet on Adolescent Health Care Utilization
- Fact Sheet on Demographics: Children & Adolescents
- Fact Sheet on Mental Health: Adolescents & Young Adults
- Fact Sheet on Mortality: Adolescents & Young Adults
- Fact Sheet on Preventive Health Services for Adolescents
- Fact Sheet on Reproductive Health: Adolescents & Young Adults
- Fact Sheet on Substance Use: Adolescents & Young Adults
- Fact Sheet on Suicide: Adolescents & Young Adults
- Fact Sheet on Unintentional Injury: Adolescents & Young Adults
- Fact Sheet on Violence: Adolescents & Young Adults

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**Background on NAHIC**

The National Adolescent Health Information Center (NAHIC) was established with funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau in 1993 (4H06 MC00002) to serve as a national resource for adolescent health research and information to assure the integration, synthesis, coordination and dissemination of adolescent health-related information.

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Copies of any of the listed Adolescent Fact Sheets can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://youth.ucsf.edu/nahic>. Hard copies can be requested at (415) 502-4856, or by email at: [nahic@itsa.ucsf.edu](mailto:nahic@itsa.ucsf.edu).



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