

NIDA InfoFacts: High School and Youth Trends - The National Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/HSYouthtrends.html>

Trends in Use

Since 1975, the Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey has studied annually the extent of **drug use among 12th-graders. The survey was expanded in 1991 to include 8th- and 10th-graders.** It is funded by NIDA and is conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The goal of the survey is to collect data on past month, past year, and lifetime⁽¹⁾ **drug use among students in these grade levels. The 32nd annual study was conducted during 2006.**⁽²⁾

Decreases or stability in abuse patterns were noted for most drugs from 2005 to 2006. Below are the key findings, based on data from the 2006 MTF and, in some instances, from other recent MTF survey data. For individual drugs, a decrease or increase is noted only if statistically significant; other trends are considered stable and are not highlighted below.

Positive Trends:

- **Any illicit drug** – Since the peak years of drug abuse in the mid-1990s, there have been **decreases among all three grades in the “any illicit drug” category. Based on 2006 data, past year prevalence has fallen by 37 percent among 8th-graders since the peak year in 1996. The peak year for past year abuse among 10th- and 12th-graders was 1997; since then, past year prevalence has fallen by 25 percent among 10th-graders and by 14 percent among 12th-graders.** Combining all three grades, past month abuse for any illicit drug has dropped by 23 percent since 2001.
- **Marijuana** – **Lifetime marijuana abuse decreased among 10th-graders, from 34.1 percent in 2005 to 31.8 percent in 2006. Past year prevalence of marijuana abuse fell by 36 percent among 8th-graders since their peak year of abuse (1996) and by 28 percent among 10th-graders and 18 percent among 12th-graders since their peak year of abuse (1997).** Perceived availability⁽³⁾ of marijuana fell among 10th-graders, from 72.6 percent in 2005 to 70.7 percent in 2006.
- **Methamphetamine** – **Past year and past month abuse of methamphetamine decreased among 10th-graders from 2005 to 2006** (2.9 percent to 1.8 percent for past year; 1.1 percent to 0.7 percent for past month). Among 12th-graders, perceived risk of harm from trying crystal methamphetamine (“ice”) increased from 54.6 percent in 2005 to 59.1 percent in 2006.
- **Prescription Drugs** – **Past year abuse of OxyContin decreased among 12th-graders for the first time since its inclusion in the survey in 2002**, from 5.5 percent in 2005 to 4.3 percent in 2006. Perception of harm from trying sedatives/barbiturates “once or twice” increased among 12th-graders, from 24.7 percent in 2005 to 28.0 percent in 2006. **(This question is asked only of 12th-graders.)** (See also [Negative Trends](#).)
- **Inhalants** – After some increases in recent years, **there were no significant changes from 2005 to 2006 in the proportion of students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades** reporting lifetime, past year, or past month abuse of inhalants.
- **Cigarettes/Nicotine** – **Lifetime abuse of cigarettes decreased among 10th- and 12th-graders from 2005 to 2006** (38.9 percent to 36.1 percent for 10th-graders; 50.0 percent to 47.1 percent for 12th-graders). Past year abuse of bidis (small, flavored cigarettes from India) decreased among 12th-graders, from 3.3 percent in 2005 to 2.3 percent in 2006. **(This question was asked only of 12th-graders from 2005 to 2006.)**
- **Crack Cocaine** – **Past year abuse of crack decreased for 10th-graders**, from 1.7 percent in 2005 to 1.3 percent in 2006.
- **Heroin** – **Among 8th-graders, past month heroin abuse decreased**, from 0.5 percent in 2005 to 0.3 percent in 2006. Perceived risk of harm from using heroin “once or twice” or “occasionally” increased among 12th-graders from 2005 to 2006. Among 10th-graders, perceived availability of heroin fell, from 19.3 percent in 2005 to 17.4 percent in 2006.
- **MDMA (Ecstasy)** – **Among 10th-graders, perceived availability of MDMA decreased** from 30.2 percent in 2005 to 27.4 percent in 2006. (See also [Negative Trends](#).)
- **Anabolic Steroids** – **Among 12th-graders, perceived risk of steroid abuse increased**, from 56.8 percent in 2005 to 60.2 percent in 2006. **(This question is asked only of 12th-graders.)**
- **Alcohol** – **Lifetime and past year abuse of alcohol decreased for 12th-graders from 2005 to 2006** (75.1 percent to 72.7 percent for lifetime; 68.6 percent to 66.5 percent for past year).⁽⁴⁾

Negative Trends:

- **Prescription Drugs – Past year abuse of OxyContin and Vicodin, first measured in 2002, continued at levels that raise concern. Past year abuse of Vicodin was 3.0 percent among 8th-graders, 7.0 percent among 10th-graders, and 9.7 percent among 12th-graders in 2006, remaining stable but at relatively high levels for each grade. Despite a drop in past year abuse of OxyContin among 12th-graders in 2006, abuse among 8th-graders has nearly doubled since 2002** (from 1.3 percent in 2002 to 2.6 percent in 2006).⁽⁵⁾ (See also [Positive Trends](#).)
- **MDMA (Ecstasy)** – From 2005 to 2006, the percentage of 8th-graders decreased who saw great risk in using MDMA "once or twice" (40.0 percent to 32.8 percent) and in using "occasionally" (60.8 percent to 52.0 percent). Also, disapproval of MDMA use decreased among 8th-graders from 2005 to 2006 for trying "once or twice" (75.0 percent to 66.7 percent) and taking "occasionally" (77.9 percent to 69.8 percent). (See also [Positive Trends](#).)
- **Hallucinogens** – From 2005 to 2006, the percentage of 8th-graders decreased who perceived risk of harm from "taking LSD regularly" (44.0 percent to 40.0 percent) and who disapproved of using LSD "once or twice" (58.5 percent to 53.9 percent).

Race/Ethnicity Differences – Key Findings for 2006:

(Observed differences between categories have not been evaluated for statistical significance.)

African-American students have lower rates on the following MTF measures compared with White or Hispanic students:

- Past year illicit drug abuse among 12th-graders
- "Any illicit drug other than marijuana," in all three grade levels
- Cigarette smoking
- Alcohol abuse among 10th and 12th grade students

Among African-American, Hispanic, and White 12th-graders, Whites have the highest rates of past year illicit drug abuse.

Prevalence of past month alcohol abuse is higher among Hispanic 8th-graders than their White or African-American counterparts.

Gender Effects – Key Findings for 2006:

(Observed differences between categories have not been evaluated for statistical significance.)

Past year use of "any illicit drug" is roughly the same for males and females in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades.

Use of "any illicit drug other than marijuana" is slightly higher among females than males in the 8th and 10th grades, but is higher among males in the 12th grade.

Drugs that continue to show a clear gender difference in prevalence of abuse are anabolic steroids and smokeless tobacco (both are more likely to be abused by males than females) and amphetamines and methamphetamine (more likely to be abused by females).

Marijuana abuse is more prevalent among males than females in all three grades.

There is a continuing pattern of higher abuse rates of OxyContin and Vicodin among males compared with females in the 12th grade.

Declines and Increases from 2005 to 2006:

(Reported differences are statistically significant.)

- **Females – Past year abuse of methamphetamine declined among 10th grade females**, from 3.0 percent in 2005 to 2.0 percent in 2006. **Past year abuse of MDMA among 12th grade females increased**, from 2.7 percent in 2005 to 4.0 percent in 2006.

- **Males – Declines were noted among 10th grade males in past year abuse of methamphetamine,** from 2.6 percent in 2005 to 1.7 percent in 2006. **Declines were noted among 12th grade males for past year abuse of any illicit drug,** from 42.1 percent in 2005 to 37.5 percent in 2006; marijuana, from 37.6 percent in 2005 to 32.7 percent in 2006; OxyContin, from 7.4 percent in 2005 to 5.3 percent in 2006; amphetamines, from 9.1 percent in 2005 to 7.4 percent in 2006; and ice, from 2.5 percent in 2005 to 1.5 percent in 2006. **Declines also were noted among 12th grade males for past month prevalence of alcohol abuse,** from 50.7 percent in 2005 to 47.3 percent in 2006; binge drinking, from 33.4 percent in 2005 to 29.8 percent in 2006; cigarette abuse, from 24.8 percent in 2005 to 22.4 percent in 2006; daily smoking, from 14.6 percent in 2005 to 12.0 percent in 2006; and smoking _ pack or more per day, from 8.0 percent in 2005 to 6.2 percent in 2006.
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(1) "Lifetime" refers to use at least once during a respondent's lifetime. "Past year" refers to use at least once during the year preceding an individual's response to the survey. "past month" refers to use at least once during the 30 days preceding an individual's response to the survey. "Daily" refers to an individual's drug use 20 or more times in the 30 days prior to the survey, except for cigarettes, where the definition is one or more cigarettes per day in the 30 days prior to the survey.

(2) For the 2006 MTF, 48,460 students in a nationally representative sample of 410 public and private schools were surveyed about lifetime, past year, past month, and daily use of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. The latest data are online at www.drugabuse.gov

(3) In addition to studying drug use among 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders, MTF collects information on three attitudinal indicators related to their drug use. These indicators are perceived risk of harm in taking a drug, disapproval of others who take drugs, and perceived availability of drugs.

(4) For information on the health effects of alcohol, visit the Web site of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism at www.niaaa.nih.gov.

(5) For more information on the misuse or nonmedical use of pain medications or other prescription drugs, please visit www.drugabuse.gov and click on Prescription Medications under Drugs of Abuse.