

Nationwide Trends

A number of information sources are used to quantify America's drug problem and to monitor drug abuse trends. Foremost among these sources are the Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey[†] and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health^{††} (NSDUH). Since 1975, the MTF survey has measured drug, alcohol, and cigarette use as well as related attitudes among adolescent students nationwide. For the 2010 survey, 46,482 students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades from 396 public and private schools participated. Funded by NIDA, the MTF survey is conducted by investigators at the University of Michigan.

The NSDUH is an annual survey on the nationwide prevalence and incidence of illicit drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, abuse, and dependence among Americans aged 12 years and older, conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Approximately 67,500 people are included in this survey. Because of differences in the timing of administration of the surveys, reported NSDUH data are 1 year behind those of MTF.

In MTF and NSDUH, there are three primary prevalence periods for which data are reported: lifetime, past year, and past month

(also referred to as "current"). It is generally believed that *past year* and *past month* are the better indicators of actual use. However, some analyses are done for only one specific prevalence period.

Additional sources of information are provided at the end of this fact sheet.

Trends in Use

Alcohol

According to NSDUH, overall prevalence of underage (ages 12–20) alcohol use and binge drinking has shown a gradual decline across all prevalence periods.

In 2009, an estimated 30.2 million people (12.0 percent) aged 12 or older reported driving under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year. Although this reflects a downward trend from 14.2 percent in 2002, it remains a cause for concern.

Tobacco

According to NIDA's MTF survey, teen smoking rates are at their lowest point in the history of the survey. Peak smoking levels among teens were reached around 1996 and 1997 among all three grades surveyed. In the 5 or 6 years

immediately following those peaks, smoking levels fell sharply, after which the decline began to slow.

The NSDUH found that from 2002 to 2009, the rate of past-month cigarette use fell from 13.0 percent to 8.9 percent among 12- to 17-year-olds. Another encouraging trend is the decline in cigarette use by young adults aged 18 to 25 years; rates of use fell from 40.8 percent in 2002 to 35.8 percent in 2009.

The use of smokeless tobacco (which includes snuff, plug, dipping tobacco, chewing tobacco, and more recently “snus”) also is assessed in the MTF study. From the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, there was a substantial decline in smokeless tobacco use among teens—monthly prevalence fell by one third to one half—but the declines have not continued.

Recently, the use of hookah water pipes and small cigars has also raised public health concerns. Questions about these forms of tobacco use were included in the survey of 12th graders for the first time in 2010, yielding an annual prevalence rate of 17.0 percent for hookah smoking and 23.0 percent for the use of small cigars.

Illicit Drugs

The decline in illicit drug use by the Nation’s adolescents since the mid- to late-1990s has leveled off. Among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, most measures of illicit drug use remained unchanged from 2009 to 2010. Marijuana use rose this year—a sharp contrast to the considerable decline of the preceding decade. The downward trend in ecstasy use has been reversed as well, with significant increases this year following a considerable and recent decline in the belief that its use is dangerous.

- Daily **marijuana** use increased among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders from 2009 to 2010. Among 12th graders, use was at its highest point since the early 1980s, at 6.1 percent. This year, perceived risk of regular marijuana use also declined among 10th and 12th graders, suggesting future trends in use may continue upward. In addition, most measures of marijuana use increased among 8th graders between 2009 and 2010, paralleling softening attitudes for the last 2 years about the risk of marijuana. Marijuana use is now ahead of cigarette smoking on some measures; in 2010, 21.4 percent of high school seniors used marijuana in the past 30 days, while 19.2 percent smoked cigarettes.

- Trends in lifetime use of **amphetamine** and **methamphetamine** indicate statistically significant declines from peak-year use among all three grades combined. Amphetamine use peaked in 1996 at 15.5 percent and decreased to 8.9 percent in 2010. Methamphetamine use declined from 6.5 percent in 1999 to 2.2 percent in 2010.
- According to NSDUH, current **cocaine** use gradually declined between 2003 and 2009 among people aged 12 or older (from 2.3 million to 1.6 million). MTF survey results show a steady decline in 2010 for current, annual, and lifetime prevalence of cocaine and crack abuse among all three grades combined from peak-year use in 1999.
- After several years of decline, current and past-year use of **ecstasy** (MDMA) has risen among 8th and 10th graders. From 2009 to 2010, lifetime use of ecstasy among 8th graders increased from 2.2 percent to 3.3 percent, past-year use from 1.3 percent to 2.4 percent, and current use from 0.6 percent to 1.1 percent. These increases follow declines in perceived risk associated with MDMA use seen over the past several years.
- Annual rates of **hallucinogen** use remained unchanged from 2009 to 2010, although significant increases were

reported by 12th graders for annual (2.6 percent) and past-month (0.8 percent) use of **LSD**. This still represents a significant decline from the mid 1990s, when 8.8 percent of 12th graders reported past-year use of LSD and 4.0 percent reported past-month use.

- Past-year use of **inhalants** also remained steady from 2009 to 2010, with 8 percent of 8th graders reporting past-year use.

Prescription Drugs

Prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications accounted for most of the top drugs abused by 12th graders in the past year. Among 12th graders, past-year nonmedical use of Vicodin decreased from 9.7 percent to 8.0 percent. However, past-year nonmedical use of Oxycontin remained unchanged across the three grades and has increased among 10th graders over the past 5 years. Moreover, past-year nonmedical use of Adderall and OTC cough and cold medicines among 12th graders remained high at 6.5 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively.

Complete NSDUH findings are available at www.oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUHLatest.htm.

Complete MTF survey findings are available at www.monitoringthefuture.org.

Other Information Sources

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a school-based survey that collects data from students in grades 9–12. The survey includes questions on a wide variety of health-related risk behaviors, including drug abuse. The survey is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. More information is available at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm.

Additional information about high school and youth trends is available on the NIDA Web site at www.drugabuse.gov/infacts/hsyouthtrends.html.

Data Sources

† These data are from the 2010 Monitoring the Future survey, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, and conducted annually by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The survey has tracked 12th graders' illicit drug use and related attitudes since 1975; in 1991, 8th and 10th graders were added to the study. The latest data are on line at www.drugabuse.gov.

†† NSDUH (formerly known as the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse) is an annual survey of Americans aged 12 and older conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services. This survey is available on line at www.samhsa.gov.