

# New Study On Teen Drug Use Shows Cause for Concern

The National Institute on Drug Abuse annual “Monitoring the Future” study finds a big drop in teen use of meth, declines in alcohol and tobacco use, little change in marijuana smoking and continued high rates of prescription drug abuse.

*“In addition, the survey recently started measuring how teens obtain the prescription drugs they took for non-medical use. **Nineteen percent of 12th graders report they got their drugs by a doctor’s prescription, and 8% report buying them from a dealer. However, the vast majority—66%—say they got the drugs from a friend or relative. Of these, twelve percent reported they “took” them; 21% reported “buying” them and 33% say they were “given” the drugs. Interestingly, teens did not report they were buying the drugs over the Internet.**”*

## Teen Methamphetamine Use, Cigarette Smoking at Lowest Levels

in NIDA’s 2009 Monitoring the Future Survey

### *Downward Marijuana Trend Stalls and Prescription Drug Abuse Worrisome*

WASHINGTON – Methamphetamine use among teens appears to have dropped significantly in recent years, according to NIDA’s annual Monitoring the Future (MTF) Survey, released today at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. However, declines in marijuana use have stalled, and prescription drug abuse remains high. The Monitoring the Future survey is a series of classroom surveys of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan under a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The number of high school seniors reporting they used methamphetamine in the past year is now at only 1.2%—the lowest rate since it was added to the survey in 1999, when it was reported at 4.7%. In addition, the percentage of 10th graders reporting that crystal meth was easy to obtain has dropped to 14%, down from 19.5% five years ago.

“We applaud the reduction of methamphetamine use, however we know that each new generation of teens brings unique prevention and education challenges,” said NIH Director Francis Collins. “What makes the Monitoring the Future Survey such a valuable public health tool is that it not only helps us identify where our prevention efforts have been successful, it also helps us identify new trends in drug use and attitudes.”

“The Monitoring the Future survey shows progress in many areas, but also suggests that there have been changes in attitudes and behavior that could signal problems in the future,” said Director Gil Kerlikowske of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

“Patterns of illicit drug use change over time, and constant re-evaluation and refinement are required to ensure federal, state and local programs are targeted at addressing current and future challenges, rather than those of the past.”

### **Tobacco**

Meanwhile, cigarette smoking is now at the lowest point in the survey’s history on all measures for 8th, 10th and 12th graders. For example, only 2.7% of 8th graders describe themselves as daily smokers, down from a peak rate of 10.4% in 1996. Similarly, 11.2% of high school seniors say they smoke daily, less than half of the 24.6% rate in 1997. However, one area of concern is the rate of smokeless tobacco use. The rate of 10th graders using smokeless tobacco in the past month is 6.5%, up from last year and the same as it was in 1999.

“The decline in cigarette smoking translates to longer, healthier lives for today’s young people,” said NIDA Director Dr. Nora Volkow. “And while it is disheartening that smokeless tobacco use is up again, the survey is telling us where we need to target our prevention resources.”

### **Illicit Drugs**

Marijuana use across the three grades has shown a consistent decline since the mid-1990s, however that trajectory has stalled with rates at the same level as five years ago. In the 2009 survey, reported past year marijuana use was about the same as the previous year: 32.8% of 12th graders, 26.7% of 10th graders, and 11.8% of 8th graders. However, marijuana use is still down significantly from its peak in the mid-late 1990s.

The MTF Survey also measures teen attitudes about drugs, including perceived harmfulness, perceived availability, and disapproval, which are often seen as harbingers of abuse. For example, the percentage of 8th graders who view occasional marijuana smoking as potentially harmful is down to 44.8%, compared to 48.1% last year and 57.9% in 1991.

“We are keeping an eye on the marijuana trends to see if softening attitudes in the 8th grade translate to greater use in the next few years,” said Dr. Volkow. “However, the data on some other illicit drugs is more encouraging.”

Past year use of cocaine decreased to 3.4% from 4.4% in 2008 among 12th graders, and past year use of hallucinogens also fell among high school seniors to 4.7%, down from last year’s 5.9% rate, and significantly lower than its 2001 peak of 9.1%.

In fact, perceived harmfulness of LSD, amphetamines, sedatives/barbiturates, heroin and cocaine have all increased among 12th graders, and the perceived availability of many illicit drugs has dropped considerably. For example, 33.9% of 12th graders reported this year that it is “easy” to get powder cocaine, down from 38.9% just a year ago. Similarly, 35.1% of 12th graders said ecstasy is easy to obtain, compared to 41.9% last year.

### **Prescription Drugs**

The 2009 MTF survey indicates a continuing high rate of non-medical use of prescription drugs among teens. Seven of the top 10 drugs abused by twelfth graders in the year prior to the survey were prescribed or purchased over-the-counter.

**Nearly one in ten high school seniors reported past year non-medical use of Vicodin, and one in twenty report abusing Oxycontin, both powerful opioid painkillers. In fact, non-medical use of these painkillers has increased among 10th graders in the past 5 years.**

**For the first time this year the survey measured the non-medical use of Adderall, a stimulant commonly prescribed to treat ADHD. The survey reported that more than 5% of 10th and 12th graders reported non-medical use of the drug in the past year.**

In addition, the survey recently started measuring how teens obtain the prescription drugs they took for non-medical use. Nineteen percent of 12th graders report they got their drugs by a doctor’s prescription, and 8% report buying them from a dealer. However, the vast majority—66%—say they got the drugs from a friend or relative. Of these, twelve percent reported they “took” them; 21% reported “buying” them and 33% say they were “given” the drugs. Interestingly, teens did not report they were buying the drugs over the Internet.

### **Alcohol**

Researchers also report a softening of attitudes in some alcohol measures. Fewer 10th graders viewed weekend binge drinking (five or more drinks once or twice each weekend) as harmful and fewer high school seniors disapproved of having one or two drinks every day. Alcohol use however, has decreased in the past five years across all three grades.

### **Monitoring the Future Survey Details**

Overall, 46,097 students from 389 public and private schools in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades participated in this year's survey. Since 1975, the MTF Survey has measured drug, alcohol, and cigarette use and related attitudes in 12th graders nationwide; 8th and 10th graders were added to the survey in 1991. Survey participants report their drug use behaviors across three time periods: lifetime, past year, and past month. The survey has been conducted since its inception by a team of investigators at the University of Michigan, led by NIDA grantee Dr. Lloyd Johnston. Additional information on the MTF survey results, as well as comments from Dr. Volkow can be found at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/DrugPages/MTF.html>.

MTF is one of three major HHS-sponsored surveys that provide data on substance use among youth, along with the National Survey on Drug Use and Health and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The MTF Web site is <http://monitoringthefuture.org>. More information on MTF can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>; or <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, sponsored by HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is the primary source of statistical information on substance use in the U.S. population 12 years of age and older. The survey collects data in household interviews, using computer-assisted self-administration. More information is available at <http://www.drugabusestatistics.samhsa.gov>.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey, part of HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 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 substance abuse. More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm>.

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The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy and improve practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found on the NIDA home page at [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov). To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA's new DrugPubs research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or fax or email requests to 240-645-0227 or [drugpubs@nida.nih.gov](mailto:drugpubs@nida.nih.gov). Online ordering is available at <http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov>. NIDA's new media guide can be found at <http://drugabuse.gov/mediaguide>.

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