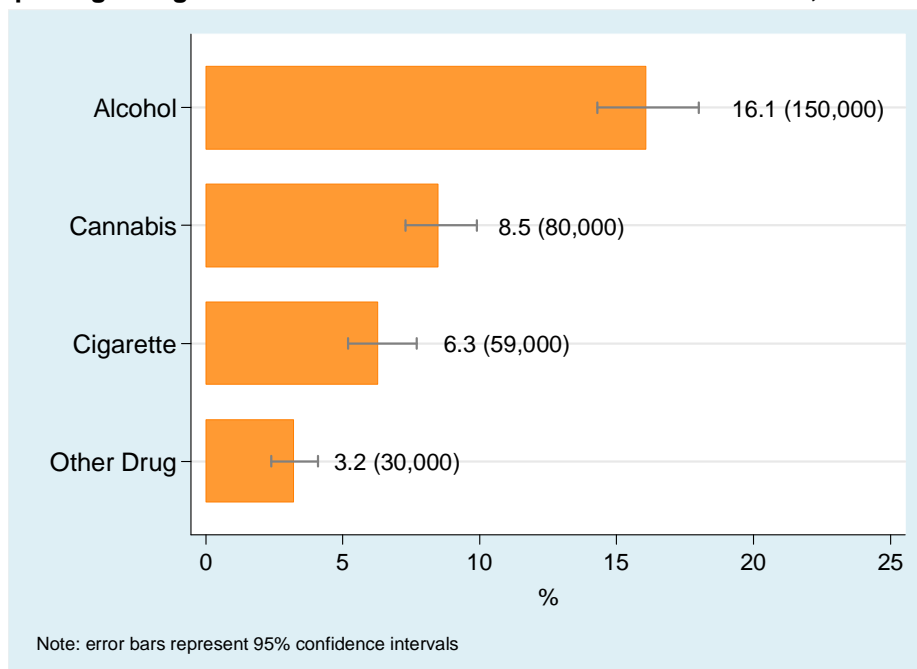


First-Time Use of Cigarettes, Alcohol, Cannabis and Other Drugs Among Ontario Students in 2007, and Changes Since 1999

Information on first-time substance use, also known as initiation, onset, or incidence, is important because initiation rates are often leading indicators of emerging patterns of substance use, and can be used to target and evaluate prevention efforts. This *eBulletin* presents findings about students' first-time use of certain substances during the past year, based on the 2007 cycle of the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS). The OSDUHS is an anonymous, in-class survey of 7th- to 12th-graders conducted every two years in Ontario schools. We examined first-time use of four substances in 2007: cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis, and any other illicit drug. We also compared these rates with those from surveys since 1999.

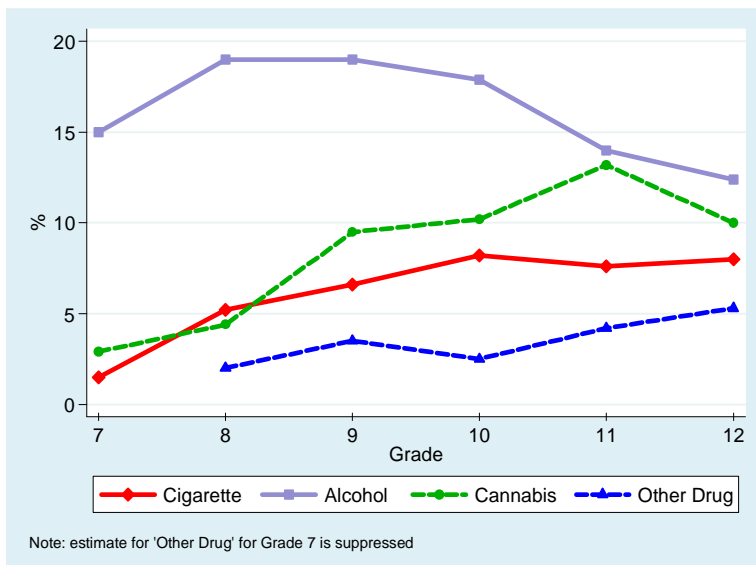
Figure 1 shows the percentage of all students reporting first-time use, based on the 2007 OSDUHS. Of the total sample, 16.1% (95% CI: 14.3%-18.0%) drank alcohol for the first time during the past year, representing about 150,000 students in grades 7 to 12. About 8.5% (7.3%-9.9%) used cannabis for the first time (representing about 80,000 students); 6.3% (5.2%-7.7%) smoked cigarettes for the first time (about 59,000 students); and 3.2% (2.4%-4.1%) used another illicit drug (not specified) for the first time, representing about 30,000 students. None of these rates significantly varies by sex or design-region of the province (data not presented).

Figure 1.
Percentage of Ontario Students (and Estimated Number) in Grades 7 to 12 Reporting Using the Substance for the First Time in the Past Year, 2007 OSDUHS



As presented in Figure 2, grade level is associated with first-time substance use. The initiation of cigarette smoking significantly increases between grades 7 and 8 (from 1.5% to 5%), increases only slightly in grade 9 to 7% and levels off thereafter at about 8%. First-time use of alcohol remains relatively steady throughout early adolescence (from 15%-19%), and significantly decreases to 12% by grade 12. The initiation of cannabis use is lowest in grade 7 (3%), jumps significantly between grades 8 and 9 (from 4% to 10%), and remains steady in grades 10 to 12 (about 10%-13%). First-time use of an illicit drug other than cannabis peaks during 11th- and 12th-grade (4%-5%).

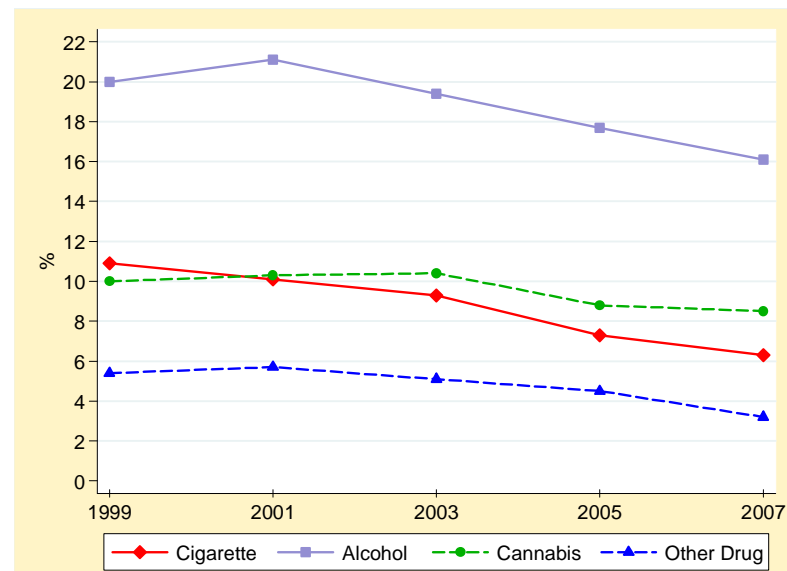
Figure 2.
Percentage of Students Reporting First-Time Use in the Past Year, by Grade, 2007 OSDUHS



Trends, 1999 – 2007

Figure 3 presents the changes in initiation rates between 1999 and 2007, among students in grades 7 to 12. First-time cigarette smoking was significantly lower in 2007 (6%) compared to estimates from 1999 (11%), 2001 (10%), and 2003 (9%), but similar to the 2005 estimate (7%). A similar trend was found for first-time alcohol use: drinking initiation was significantly lower in 2007 (16%) compared to estimates from 1999 (20%), 2001 (21%), and 2003 (19%), but similar to 2005 (18%). There was no significant change in the percentage of first-time users of cannabis over this time period (hovering between 8% and 10%). First-time use of any other illicit drug was significantly lower in 2007 (3%) compared to estimates found in each previous year (about 5%-6%).

Figure 3.
Percentage of Students in Grades 7 to 12 Reporting First-Time Use in the Past Year, 1999 – 2007 OSDUHS



Methods:

The *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS)* is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary (grades 7 and 8) and secondary (grades 9-12) school students conducted every two years since 1977. The survey uses a stratified (region, school type) two-stage cluster design (school, class). The 2007 total sample size was 6,323 students in grades 7 to 12 from 43 school boards, 119 schools, and 385 classes. The student participation rate was 68%. The 2007 sample represents about 1,011,000 students in grades 7 to 12 in public and Catholic schools across the province. Self-administered questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University on a classroom basis between November 2006 and June 2007. The present analysis is based on a random-half sample of 2935 students in 2007, 3648 in 2005, 6616 in 2003, 3898 in 2001, and 4447 in 1999. All estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design.

Terminology:

- **First-time use of cigarettes** was measured with the question: “During the last 12 months, have you smoked one whole cigarette for the very first time? Response options were yes, no, and never smoked a whole cigarette in lifetime.
- **First-time use of alcohol** was measured with the question: “During the last 12 months, have you tried alcohol (beer, wine, or liquor) for the very first time? Response options were yes, no, and never tried alcohol in lifetime.
- **First-time use of cannabis** was measured with the question: “During the last 12 months, have you tried cannabis (marijuana or hashish) for the very first time? Response options were yes, no, and never tried cannabis in lifetime.
- **First-time use of any other illicit drug** was measured with the question: “During the last 12 months, have you used any other illegal drug (such as cocaine, heroin, LSD, etc.) for the very first time? Response options were yes, no, and never tried an illegal drug in lifetime.
- **Design-Region.** As part of the survey sample design, Ontario was divided into 4 regions using the following boundaries: Toronto; North (schools within the North Bay area and farther north); East (schools within York Region and farther east); West (schools within Peel Region and farther west).
- **95% Confidence Interval (CI)** can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the “true” value if every student in grades 7 to 12 in Ontario was surveyed.
- **Statistically Significant Difference** refers to a difference between two percentages that is not likely due to chance. For example, a difference found at the $p < .05$ level of statistical significance is one that is less than 5% likely to occur by chance alone.

Source:

Adlaf, E.M. & Paglia-Boak, A. (2007). *Drug Use Among Ontario Students, 1977-2007: Detailed OSDUHS Findings*. CAMH Research Document Series, No. 20. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (The report is available in PDF format at <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>.)

Suggested Citation:

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. First-Time Use of Cigarettes, Alcohol, Cannabis and Other Drugs Among Ontario Students in 2007, and Changes Since 1999. *CAMH Population Studies eBulletin*, September/October 2008, Vol. 9, No. 5. Toronto, Ontario: CAMH.

To receive future issues of the *eBulletin*, please contact Christine Vrbanac via email at: christine_vrbanac@camh.net

Previous issues of the *eBulletin* are available at: http://www.camh.net/research/population_life_course.html

Media Enquiries: Tel: 416-595-6015