

The 2003 OSDUS Drug Report Executive Summary

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*, is the longest ongoing school survey of adolescents in Canada. The study, which spans over two decades, is based on 14 surveys conducted every two years since 1977. In the spring of 2003, 6,616 students (72% of selected students) in grades 7 to 12 from 37 school boards, 126 schools and 383 classes participated in the survey administered by the Institute for Social

Research, York University. This report describes drug use in 2003 and changes since 1977. Data are provided for two groups of students: those in grades 7 to 12, and those in grades 7, 9, and 11 only. The first group is used to assess current and short-term drug use trends (1999-2003), and the second is used to assess long-term trends (1977-2003). All data are based on self-reports derived from anonymous questionnaires administered in classrooms.

Past Year Drug Use (%) by Total, Sex, and Grade, 2003 OSDUS

	Total	Males	Females		G7	G8	G9	G10	G11	G12	
<i>Alcohol</i>	66.2	68.3	64.3	*	39.1	48.9	65.1	75.1	79.9	82.5	*
<i>Cannabis</i>	29.6	30.9	28.3		6.2	10.7	27.9	35.9	45.0	44.8	*
<i>Binge Drinking</i>	26.5	29.4	23.8	*	5.8	7.7	23.5	29.8	40.9	45.2	*
<i>Cigarettes</i>	19.2	18.0	20.3		4.4	10.2	17.0	21.8	28.3	30.2	*
<i>Hallucinogens</i>	10.0	12.1	8.0	*	1.8	2.6	7.8	12.5	17.4	15.3	*
<i>Solvents</i>	6.1	5.9	6.3		10.2	9.5	6.5	4.2	3.6	3.9	*
<i>Stimulants (NM)</i>	5.8	4.7	6.7	*	1.6	3.7	5.6	6.6	8.2	7.8	*
<i>Cocaine</i>	4.8	5.4	4.3		3.1	1.9	4.9	4.6	6.9	6.7	*
<i>Ecstasy (MDMA)</i>	4.1	4.2	3.9		0.5	0.8	3.7	4.6	6.6	7.2	*
<i>Methamphetamine</i>	3.3	3.8	2.9		1.0	0.9	3.8	4.2	5.4	3.6	*
<i>LSD</i>	2.9	3.5	2.3	*	0.7	1.1	3.7	4.2	4.0	2.7	*
<i>Ritalin (NM)</i>	2.9	3.4	2.5		1.2	1.2	3.0	3.3	5.0	3.1	*
<i>Glue</i>	2.8	3.0	2.6		5.2	3.2	2.4	2.4	2.3	1.8	*
<i>Crack</i>	2.7	2.8	2.6		1.7	1.7	3.1	3.0	3.6	2.5	
<i>Barbiturates (NM)</i>	2.5	2.6	2.5		1.8	2.2	3.0	2.8	3.1	1.8	
<i>PCP</i>	2.2	2.9	1.6	*	1.3	0.8	2.1	3.6	2.6	2.7	*
<i>Tranquillizers (NM)</i>	2.2	2.7	1.8	*	0.6	1.2	1.8	2.4	4.1	2.7	*
<i>Ketamine</i>	2.2	3.0	1.6	*	1.0	s	1.7	1.6	4.7	3.7	*
<i>Rohypnol</i>	1.6	1.7	1.5		1.2	1.2	1.4	2.0	2.3	1.3	
<i>Heroin</i>	1.4	1.9	0.9	*	1.4	0.8	1.5	2.0	1.3	1.1	
<i>Ice</i>	1.2	1.3	1.0		1.2	0.8	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.5	
<i>GHB</i>	0.7	0.8	0.6		s	s	s	0.9	1.7	s	
<i>Any Illicit, including cannabis</i>	32.2	33.1	31.3		10.1	13.9	29.6	38.6	47.5	47.1	*
<i>Any Illicit, excluding cannabis</i>	15.3	16.6	14.2	*	6.6	8.0	13.0	18.0	21.7	22.3	*
<i>Steroids (lifetime)</i>	3.0	4.4	1.7	*	0.7	1.8	1.6	3.8	4.6	5.3	*

Notes: binge drinking (5+ drinks on one occasion) refers to the past 4 weeks time period; NM=non-medical use; s=estimate suppressed; * indicates a significant a sex difference, or grade differences (p<.05), *not* controlling for other factors.

2003 Subgroup Differences (G7-12)

- ❑ Males are more likely than females to use 7 drugs: alcohol, LSD, PCP, other hallucinogens, tranquilizers, Ketamine, and heroin. Males are also more likely to binge drink, and generally to use any illicit drug, excluding cannabis. Females are more likely to use stimulants (e.g., diet pills).
- ❑ Drug use varies by grade. With the exception of inhalants (glue and solvents) – which declines by grade level – drug use is lowest among 7th-graders and highest among 11th- and 12th-graders. A prominent grade pattern reflects a sizeable jump in the likelihood of drug use between grade 8 and grade 9.
- ❑ Regional differences exist for 5 drug use measures (cigarette smoking, binge drinking, use of stimulants, hallucinogens, and Ritalin). Students from Toronto are least likely to use these drugs, whereas Northern students are most likely. Students from the East and West do not differ from the province as a whole.

Changes Between 2001 and 2003 (G7-12)

The escalating trend in drug use, which began in the early 1990s, has generally subsided.

Between 2001 and 2003, the past year use of 5 measures significantly decreased:

- ❑ Cigarettes: from 23.1% to 19.2%
- ❑ Ecstasy: from 6.0% to 4.1%
- ❑ LSD: from 4.8% to 2.9%
- ❑ Barbiturates: from 4.0% to 2.5%
- ❑ The use of any illicit drug, excluding cannabis, also declined, from 18% to 15%.

Short-Term Changes, 1999 – 2003 (G7-12)

There have been significant changes in drug use between 1999 and 2003, most of which have been declines:

- ❑ Cigarettes: from 28% to 19%
- ❑ LSD: from 6.8% to 2.9%
- ❑ Hallucinogens: from 12.8% to 10.0%
- ❑ Methamphetamine: from 5.0% to 3.3%
- ❑ Barbiturates: from 4.4% to 2.5%
- ❑ Use of any illicit drug, excluding cannabis, significantly decreased between 1999 (20%) and 2003 (15%).
- ❑ Cocaine use *increased* over the short-term, from 3.4% in 1999 to 4.8% in 2003.

Subgroup Changes, 1999 – 2003 (G7-12)

With the exception of cannabis use (which increased among females); cocaine use (which increased among 12th-graders, and Northern students); and crack use (which increased among Northern students), most subgroup changes between 1999 and 2003 show decreases in use.

- ❑ Sex: Males show decreases in cigarette smoking, use of methamphetamine, LSD, ecstasy, and any illicit drug (excluding cannabis). No drug increased among males. Females show decreases in cigarette smoking, use of barbiturates, LSD, and any illicit drug (excluding cannabis).
- ❑ Grade: Among 8th-graders, 5 drug use measures declined (cigarettes, LSD, other hallucinogens, ecstasy, and any illicit drug excluding cannabis); 4 declined among 9th-graders (cigarettes, LSD, ecstasy, and any illicit drug excluding cannabis); 5 declined among 10th-graders (cigarettes, barbiturates, LSD, other hallucinogens, and any illicit drug); 3 declined among 11th-graders (cigarettes, LSD, and any illicit drug)

excluding cannabis); and 2 declined among 12th-graders (methamphetamine and LSD).

- ❑ **Region:** There were 4 decreases among students in Northern Ontario (cigarettes, barbiturates, LSD, and any illicit drug excluding cannabis). In Western Ontario, cigarette smoking, use of LSD, ecstasy, and any illicit drug decreased. In Eastern Ontario, cigarette smoking, LSD use and any illicit drug use declined. No short-term changes occurred among Toronto students.

Long-Term Changes, 1977 – 2003 (G7, 9, 11 only)

There are 5 general patterns that describe the long-term trends in drug use:

1) Decreased during the 1980s, Increased during the 1990s, Currently Stable, but Elevated:

Alcohol
Binge Drinking
Inhalants
Cannabis
Ecstasy
Hallucinogens

2) Decreased during the 1980s, Increased during the 1990s, Currently on a Downward Trend:

Cigarettes
LSD

3) Decreased during the 1980s, Upward movement during the 1990s:

Cocaine
Crack

4) Decreased during the 1980s, Stable during the 1990s:

Stimulants
Tranquillizers
Barbiturates

5) Low and Stable:

Heroin
PCP
Methamphetamines

Other Highlights

Patterns of Use

- ❑ About two-thirds (68%) of students have not used any illicit drug, including cannabis, in the past year. Conversely, 32% of students have used an illicit drug, including cannabis.
- ❑ About one-third (30%) of students do not consume any substance, including alcohol or tobacco, and another third (31%) consume only alcohol.
- ❑ One-in-ten (10%) students report using alcohol, tobacco, cannabis *and* at least one illicit drug.
- ❑ The percentage reporting first-time drug use during the past year is as follows: 19% for alcohol, 10% for cannabis, 9% for cigarettes, and 5% for illicit drugs other than cannabis.

Age of First Use

- ❑ The average age at which students smoke their first whole cigarette is currently about age 13. This average age has increased since the early 1980s, when it was age 11.
- ❑ The average age of first alcohol use is about age 13, and has not showed any major fluctuations over the past two decades.
- ❑ The average age of first cannabis use is currently about 14. Historically, this onset age increased throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and then decreased again in recent years.

Perceptions of Risk and Disapproval

- ❑ Among the drug behaviours surveyed, students felt that the greatest risk of harm is associated with regular marijuana use (55%), followed by trying ecstasy (40%), trying cocaine (34%), trying LSD (32%), daily drinking (31%), smoking 1 or 2 cigarettes daily (24%), and trying cannabis (19%).
- ❑ Compared to 2001, there was a significant increase in 2003 in the perception of great risk in trying ecstasy (32% vs 40%). There was also a parallel increase in the percentage that strongly disapproves of trying ecstasy (39% vs 49%).
- ❑ Since the early 1990s, risk perceptions surrounding most substance use (except ecstasy) have gradually weakened, especially regarding cannabis.

Availability of Drugs

- ❑ In 2003, the substances most available to students are alcohol (66% of students indicated that it would be “easy” or “very easy” to get) and cannabis (51%). Cocaine (21%), ecstasy (20%) and LSD (16%) are reported as less available.
- ❑ The reported availability of LSD significantly decreased between 1999 (25%) and 2003 (16%). Similarly, the availability of ecstasy significantly decreased between 2001 (27%) and 2003 (20%).
- ❑ The reported availability of cannabis, as well as cocaine, has significantly increased since 1989.

School and Neighbourhood

- ❑ About half (53%) of students believe that drug use in their school is higher today than a few years ago (16% stated it was the same and 31% said it was lower).

- ❑ About one-quarter (28%) of students believe that drug use is a big problem in their school, while about half (51%) say it is a small problem and 21% say it is not a problem.
- ❑ About one-third (32%) of students report exposure to drug selling in their neighbourhood in the past year. The proportion of students observing drug selling in their neighbourhood has significantly increased since 1995.
- ❑ Just over one-third (37%) report that someone tried to sell them drugs in the past year.

Cigarettes Overview

- ❑ In 2003, 19% of students report smoking during the past year (about 185,100 students). Over their lifetime, 57% of students have never smoked, 15% smoked a few puffs only, while 10% smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetime.
- ❑ Past year smoking does not differ between males and females. There are significant differences by grade (varying from 4% of 7th-graders to 30% of 12th-graders). There are also regional differences, with Northern students (24%) most likely to smoke, while Toronto students (16%) are least likely.
- ❑ About 14% of students smoke on a daily basis. On average, smokers consume 5 cigarettes daily.
- ❑ About one-quarter (23%) of smokers report dependence on cigarettes, as defined by smoking within 30 minutes of waking in the morning.
- ❑ In 2003, 62% of all smokers reported an attempt to quit smoking during the year before the survey.
- ❑ In 2003, 9% of underage students (under 19 years of age) successfully purchased

cigarettes at least once during the month before the survey.

Alcohol Overview

- ❑ In 2003, about two-thirds (66%) of all students report drinking during the past year, and 69% report drinking during their lifetime. Males are more likely to drink than are females (68% vs 64%). Past year drinking varies by grade (increasing from 39% of 7th-graders to about 80% of 11th- and 12th-graders). There are no significant regional differences.
- ❑ In 2003, 18% of drinkers (12% of all students) drink alcohol at least once a week, and less than 1% drink on a daily basis.
- ❑ About one-quarter (26%) of students report binge drinking (5+ drinks on one occasion) at least once during the month before the survey. A similar proportion (24%) report getting drunk at least once during this time.
- ❑ Also, about 15% of drinkers report binge drinking 2 to 3 times during the month before the survey, and another 10% report doing so four or more times.

Cannabis Overview

- ❑ Just under one-in-three (30%) students used cannabis in the past year, and 34% report using at least once in their lifetime. Cannabis use does not significantly differ between males (31%) and females (28%), nor by region. Use does significantly differ by grade (from 6% of 7th-graders to 45% of 11th- and 12th-graders).
- ❑ On average, cannabis users consumed cannabis 16 times during the year before the survey. About 14% of users (4% of all students) used cannabis daily during the month before the survey.

- ❑ Use of cannabis 6 or more times in the past year, as well as daily cannabis use, have been on an upward trend since 1989.
- ❑ One-in-ten (10%) cannabis users report a significant level of dependence symptoms.

Consequences and Problems Related to Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Drugs and Vehicles

- ❑ About one-in-seven (14%) licensed drivers in grades 10 to 12 report driving within an hour of consuming two or more drinks. The percentage drinking and driving remained stable between 2001 and 2003. However, drinking and driving among students has significantly declined since 1977.
- ❑ About one-in-five (20%) drivers in grades 10 to 12 reported driving a vehicle within one hour of using cannabis during the past year. Thus, the percentage of drivers reporting cannabis and driving is slightly higher than the percentage reporting drinking and driving.
- ❑ About one-quarter (29%) of students in grades 7 to 12 report being a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol, and 23% report being a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who had been using drugs prior to driving.

Alcohol Problems

- ❑ In 2003, 19% of students (27% of drinkers) report drinking at hazardous levels, a percentage representing some 186,700 students. Hazardous drinking varies significantly between males and females (21% vs 17%), and by grade (4% of 7th-graders to 33% of 12th-graders). There is no significant difference by region.

Drug Problems

- ❑ Just under one-in-five (18%) students report symptoms of a drug use problem. There is no significant sex or regional difference regarding drug use problems. However, there is a significant grade difference: reports are lowest among 7th- and 8th-graders (about 7%) and highest among 11th- and 12th-graders (about 27%).
- ❑ In 2003, 1.4% of students indicated that they received either alcohol and/or drug treatment in the past year. This estimate represents about 13,100 Ontario students in grades 7 to 12.

Coexisting Hazardous Drinking and Elevated Psychological Distress

- ❑ About one-in-twelve (8% or 81,100 Ontario students) report both hazardous drinking and elevated psychological distress (i.e., symptoms of anxiety and depression).
- ❑ Females are more likely than males to report these coexisting problems (10% vs 6%). There is significant variation by grade: from 2% of 7th-graders increasing to 13% of 11th- and 12th-graders. There is no significant regional variation.

Health Objectives

Two health objectives, recently established by health authorities, are related to the *OSDUS*.

The first, regarding cigarette smoking, recommends that teen smoking should not exceed 10% by 2005. The 2003 *OSDUS* found that about 14% of students in grades 7 to 12 smoke cigarettes on a daily basis.

The second, regarding alcohol and illicit drug use, recommends that the percentage of adolescents who use *no* alcohol or illicit drugs in the past 30 days should be 89% or higher by the year 2010. The 2003 *OSDUS* found that only 50% of students in grades 7 to 12 did not use

alcohol or cannabis during the month before the survey.

Although monitoring surveys such as the *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey* are effective in identifying trends in drug use, they are not designed to identify the root causes of such change. The importance of such studies, however, remains critical. They provide scientifically-based, timely data which, not only informs policy-makers and prevention programmers, but provide relevant monitoring data needed to evaluate the successes and failures of public health objectives, and prevention programs and campaigns.