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Monitoring The Future Survey Shows Rates Stable Or Down For Most Drugs

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Continued high use of marijuana by the nation's eighth, 10th and 12th graders combined with a drop in perceptions of its potential harms was revealed in this year's Monitoring the Future survey, an annual survey of eighth, 10th, and 12th-graders conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan.

The survey was carried out in classrooms around the country earlier this year, under a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health.

The 2012 survey shows that 6.5 percent of high school seniors smoke marijuana daily, up from 5.1 percent five years ago. Nearly 23 percent say they smoked it in the month prior to the survey, and just over 36 percent say they smoked within the previous year.

The survey also showed that teens' perception of marijuana's harmfulness is down, which can signal future increases in use.

Use of other illicit drugs among teens continued a steady modest decline. For example, past year illicit drug use (excluding marijuana) was at its lowest level for all three grades at 5.5 percent for eighth graders, 10.8 percent for 10th graders, and 17 percent for 12th graders. Among the most promising trends, the past year use of Ecstasy among seniors was at 3.8 percent, down from 5.3 percent last year.

The survey also looks at abuse of drugs that are easily available to teens because they are generally legal, sometimes for adults only (tobacco and alcohol), for other purposes (over-the-counter or prescribed medications; inhalants), or because they are new drugs that have not yet been banned. Most of the top drugs or drug classes abused by 12th graders are legally accessible, and therefore easily available to teens.

For the first time, the survey this year measured teen use of the much publicized emerging family of drugs known as "bath salts," containing an amphetamine-like stimulant that is often sold in drug paraphernalia stores. The data showed a relative low use among 12th graders at 1.3 percent. In

addition, the survey measured use of the hallucinogenic herb Salvia, finding that past year use dropped among 10th and 12th graders, down to 4.4 percent for 12th graders from last year's 5.9 percent.

Abuse of synthetic marijuana (also known as K-2 or Spice) stayed stable in 2012 at just over 11 percent for past year use among 12th graders. While many of the ingredients in Spice have been banned by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, manufacturers attempt to evade these legal restrictions by substituting different chemicals in their mixtures. Another drug type - inhalants - continues a downward trend.

The data shows a mixed report regarding prescription drug abuse. Twelfth graders reported non-medical use of the opioid painkiller Vicodin at a past year rate of 7.5 percent. Since the survey started measuring its use in 2002, rates hovered near 10 percent until 2010, when the survey started reporting a modest decline.

However, past year abuse of the stimulant Adderall, often prescribed to treat ADHD, has increased over the past few years to 7.6 percent among high school seniors, up from 5.4 percent in 2009. Accompanying this increased use is a decrease in the perceived harm associated with using the drug, which dropped nearly 6 percent in the past year-only 35 percent of 12th graders believe that using Adderall occasionally is risky. The survey continues to show that most teens who abused prescription medications were getting them from family members and friends.

The survey also measured abuse of over-the-counter cough and cold medicines containing dextromethorphan?5.6 percent of high school seniors abused them in the past year, a rate that has held relatively steady over the past five years.

The 2012 results also showed a continued steady decline in alcohol use, with reported use at its lowest since the survey began measuring rates. Binge drinking rates (five or more drinks in a row in the previous two weeks) have been slowly declining for eighth graders, at 5.1 percent, down from 6.4 percent in 2011, and 13.3 percent at their peak in 1996.

Cigarette smoking continues at its lowest levels among eighth, 10th and 12th graders, with dramatic long-term improvement. Significant declines were seen in lifetime use among eighth graders. Significant declines were also seen in 10th grade lifetime use of cigarettes.

The survey also measures several other kinds of tobacco delivery products. For example, past year use of small cigars was reported at nearly 20 percent for 12th graders, with an 18.3 percent rate for hookah water pipes.

Source: NIH/National Institute on Drug Abuse