



Substance Use Fact Sheet

What is Substance Use and Abuse?

Alcohol and other drugs affect the brain in different ways. Young people may experiment with substances, using only a small amount once or twice during adolescence, or they may develop a pattern of heavy use that can lead to dependence or addiction. Any substance use by an adolescent, other than that prescribed and used as directed by a doctor, should be regarded as serious. Substance abuse has potential harmful effects on the developing brain and the young person's mental health; a strong association with a high level of risk taking behavior; and the potential to develop into a substance-related disorder.

Types of Substance Use:

Alcohol

Alcohol makes people less alert and impairs concentration and coordination. In small quantities, alcohol causes people to relax and lower their inhibitions. However, alcohol use can have serious effects on physical and mental health, particularly if it starts in adolescence.

- Alcohol is a factor in approximately one-quarter of all adolescent deaths from motor vehicles.
- Long-term alcohol abuse is associated with liver disease, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and neurological damage as well as psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety, and antisocial disorder.
- Alcohol is used by more young people in the U.S. than tobacco or illicit drugs.
- In 2011, the average age of first use of alcohol was about 14.
- In 2014, 22.8% of underage people reported alcohol use.
- Nearly 61% of underage current drinkers were binge alcohol users, about 15% were heavy alcohol users.

Risk Factors



- Adolescents may associate alcohol use with becoming an adult.
- Drinking may be considered normal in the adolescent's peer or cultural group.
- Parents' use of and attitudes about alcohol also influence drinking
- Experiencing emotional or psychological problems
- Not feeling connected to family, school, or community.
- Family history of alcohol problems
- Social disadvantage and negative life events
- Enjoyment from drinking
- Other mental health problems

Types of Substance Use:

Other Drugs

Although the use of other drugs is less common than the use of alcohol, young people misuse a variety of other drugs.

- **Marijuana (Cannabis)**
 - Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States for adolescents as well as the population as a whole
 - The 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed that 7.4% of people age 12-17 used marijuana in the past month.
- **Opioid Drugs**
 - Heroin, morphine, opium, codeine, and oxycodone
 - Lifetime heroin use did not change from 1999 (2%) to 2011 (2%)
- **Pharmaceutical Drugs Used for Nonmedical Purposes**
 - Pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, and depressants
 - In 2015 nearly 13% of U.S. high school students had taken a prescription drug without a doctor's prescription.
- **Cocaine**
 - The 2014 estimate for current cocaine use among adolescents is 2%, which is similar to the estimates between 2009 and 2013, but lower than the estimates in the years from 2002 to 2008.
- **Amphetamines (Including Methamphetamine)**
 - In 2014, the percentage of high school seniors reporting past year use of cocaine in any form was 2.5%, a decrease from 1999 data reporting use of 4.7%.
 - Lifetime use among eighth graders was reported at 1% in 2014, down significantly from 2.3% in 2008.
- **Hallucinogens**
 - Hallucinogenic drug use decreased from 9.2% in 2001 to 5.8% in 2007 and then has steadily declined to 4.3% in 2014.
- **Ecstasy**
 - Lifetime use of ecstasy among high school students decreased from 8% in 2001 to 3.5% in 2014.
- **Inhalants**
 - Of 8th and 10th graders asked about their opinions regarding inhalants, only 35% think that there is a "great risk" in using an inhalant once or twice.
 - Only 55% consider regular use of inhalants to be harmful
- **Tobacco**
 - 36% of individuals with a mental illness are smokers, compared to 21% of adults without a mental health diagnosis.
 - Smoking is particularly high in people with schizophrenia. (approximately 60%)

References

Kelly, C.M., Kitchener, B.A., Jorm, A.F., (2016). *Mental Health First Aid USA: For Adults Assisting Young People*. Washington, DC: National Council for Behavioral Health. P104-110.

