

Illegal Drug Use

AMONG BC YOUTH

Survey Question

In the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey, high school students in BC were asked: “During your life, have you used any of the following drugs”¹:

- Cocaine (coke, crack, toot, snow)
- Hallucinogens (ecstasy, LSD, acid, PCP, dust, mescaline)
- Mushrooms (magic mushrooms)
- Inhalants (glue, gas, nitrous oxide, whippits, aerosols)
- Amphetamines (speed, crystal meth)
- Heroin
- Injected an illegal drug (shot up with a needle)
- Steroids without a doctor’s prescription
- Prescription pills without a doctor’s consent

Prevalence of Illegal Drug Use

- Almost a quarter of BC adolescents (23%) had ever used these illegal drugs, but most youth (77%) never used illegal drugs. The number of drug users is down from 29% in 1998.

- Use of all types of illegal drugs decreased between 1998 and 2003.
- In the 2003 survey, 10% of students had used illegal drugs three or more times in their lifetime, compared to 15% in 1998.
- Rates of illegal drug use varied: heroin, injection drugs, and illegal steroids were the least common at approximately 1%, and mushrooms were the most common at 13%.
- Twenty-two percent of males and 24% of females have tried illegal drugs.
- Females were more likely than males to use prescription pills without a doctor’s consent (11% vs. 7%).

Ever Used An Illegal Drug Not Including Marijuana (2003)

1998	29%
2003	23%

Ever Used an Illegal Drug (2003)

	1998	2003
Cocaine	7%	5%
Hallucinogens	11%	7%
Mushrooms	16%	13%
Inhalants	6%	4%
Amphetamines	5%	4%
Heroin	2%	<1%
Injected an illegal drug	1%	<1%
Steroids	2%	1%
Prescription pills without doctor's consent	10%	9%

¹A separate AHS fact sheet on marijuana use is available.

This fact sheet is one of a series on various health issues among BC youth, and may be copied for use as a handout. Data for the fact sheets were collected in the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey III, a 140-question survey completed by over 30,500 students in grades seven to twelve, in schools throughout BC. In all, 45 of BC’s 59 school districts agreed to take part in the survey. The first Adolescent Health Survey was conducted in 1992, and the second in 1998. In total, more than 72,400 BC students filled out the three surveys over a ten-year period.

The Adolescent Health Surveys were conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health of BC youth through research, information sharing, and community-based projects that address the unmet health needs of young people.



- The proportion of students who had tried illegal drugs increased as teens got older, from 14% of adolescents 14 and younger, to 25% of those 15 to 16 years old, and 33% of teens 17 and older.

Geography

- The prevalence of illegal drug use varied among students across the province, from 20% who had ever used drugs in Greater Vancouver, to 30% in the Kootenays region.

Risk Factors

- Illegal drug use is associated with the use of other substances as well. Adolescents who used illegal drugs were more likely to:
 - Be current smokers
 - Drink alcohol frequently
 - Binge drink frequently
 - Use marijuana frequently
- Illegal drug use is also associated with emotional health problems. Adolescents who used illegal drugs were more likely than those who never used drugs to have:
 - Experienced physical and/or sexual abuse
 - Experienced severe emotional distress in the past month
 - Seriously considered and/or attempted suicide in the past year
 - Run away from home in the past year

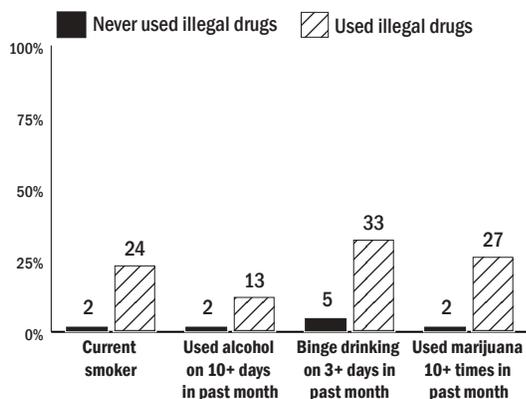
Ever Used Illegal Drugs by Region (2003)	
Greater Vancouver	20%
Capital	24%
Interior	27%
Kootenays	30%
Upper Island	23%
Northwest	23%
Northeast	27%

Ever Used An Illegal Drug by Gender (2003)		
	Males	Females
Cocaine	5%	5%
Hallucinogens	7%	7%
Mushrooms	14%	12%
Inhalants	4%	4%
Amphetamines	4%	4%
Heroin	<1%	<1%
Injected an illegal drug	<1%	<1%
Steroids	1%	1%
Prescription pills without doctor's consent	7%	11%

Frequency of Lifetime Use (2003)			
	Never used	1 or 2 times in life	3+ times in life
Cocaine	95%	3%	2%
Hallucinogens	93%	4%	3%
Mushrooms	88%	7%	5%
Inhalants	96%	3%	1%
Amphetamines	96%	3%	1%
Heroin	99%	<1%	<1%
Injected an illegal drug	99%	<1%	<1%
Steroids	99%	<1%	<1%
Prescription pills without doctor's consent	91%	6%	3%

Ever Used Illegal Drugs by Age (2003)	
14 years and younger	14%
15-16 years	25%
17+ years	33%

Smoking, Heavy Alcohol Use, and Heavy Marijuana Use Among Youth Who Have Never Used and Youth Who Have Used Illegal Drugs (2003)



Emotional Health Among Youth Who Have Never Used and Youth Who Have Used Illegal Drugs (2003)

	Never used illegal drugs	Used illegal drugs
Ever physically abused	12%	25%
Ever sexually abused	5%	15%
Serious emotional distress in past month	6%	14%
Seriously considered suicide in past year	12%	29%
Attempted suicide in the past year	4%	14%
Ran away from home in past year	5%	20%

Connectedness Among Youth Who Have Never Used and Youth Who Have Used Illegal Drugs (2003)

	Never used illegal drugs	Used illegal drugs
Average Family Connectedness Score [†]	0.80	0.70
Average School Connectedness Score [†]	0.69	0.60

[†]=Based on a zero to one scale where one refers to high family and school connectedness

Protective Factors

- Adolescents who have used illegal drugs were less connected to their families and school:
 - Youth who had used illegal drugs had a family connectedness score of .70, compared to a score of .80 for those who had not, and a school connectedness score of .60, compared to .69 for youth who hadn't.
 - The connectedness score is between zero and one. A higher score is associated with a high degree of connection, while a lower score is associated with less connection. Lower scores are generally associated with greater risk taking, while youth with strong connections to family and school have better health, are less likely to engage in risky behaviours, and have higher educational aspirations.
- 66% of teens who used illegal drugs had post-secondary educational goals, compared to 77% of youth who never used illegal drugs.