

Marijuana

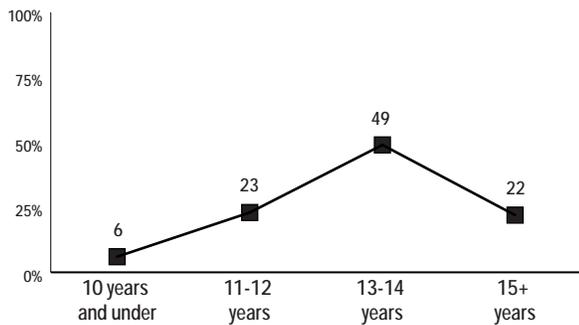
USE AMONG BC YOUTH

A sharp increase in marijuana use is one of the most striking trends noted in a recent major survey of BC youth. Results from the Adolescent Health Survey show that marijuana use clearly has grown in popularity among BC youth. While not all adolescents use marijuana, those who do are more likely to be risk-takers in various aspects of their lives. The survey confirms the continuing influence of school and family in preventing risky behaviour. The findings also confirm the need for better programs targeting those teens whose use of marijuana poses a threat to their physical or emotional health.

Forty percent of BC students in grades 7-12 in 1998 say they have tried marijuana at least once, up from 25% in 1992, according to the Adolescent Health Survey (AHS). Young people also appear to be experimenting with marijuana at a relatively young age. In 1998, over three quarters (78%) of youth who have used marijuana, say they first tried it when they were 14 years old or younger, compared to only 64% in 1992.

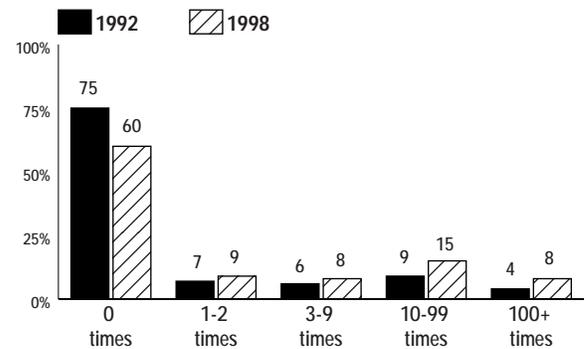
The proportion of youth who use marijuana often, also rose in recent years. Twenty-three percent of students in 1998 say they have used marijuana over 10 times in their life, compared with only 13% in 1992. Twenty-one percent of students say they used marijuana at least once in the month prior to the survey, compared with 13% in 1992.

Age When First Tried Marijuana†



† of students who have used marijuana

Lifetime Use of Marijuana



Data in this Fact Sheet were collected in 1998 through the Adolescent Health Survey II (AHS II), a 127-item questionnaire administered to 25,838 students in Grades 7-12 in schools throughout BC. In 1992, 15,549 students participated in AHS I.

AHS I and II were conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, information and community-based participation projects.



Defining the Terms

For this fact sheet, the following categories are used to describe marijuana use. A *non-user* has never used marijuana. An *experimenter* has used marijuana at least once, but not in the past 30 days. A *current user* has used marijuana one or more times in the past 30 days. Current users are further categorized as *infrequent users* (used marijuana once or twice in the past month), *frequent users* (used marijuana 3-9 times in the past month), and *heavy users* (used marijuana 10 or more times in the past month). Using these definitions, it is clear that all categories of marijuana use among BC youth have increased since 1992.

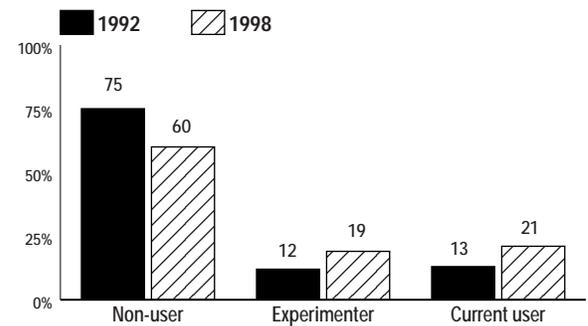
Who Uses Marijuana?

Males are somewhat more likely than females to have tried marijuana at least once. Forty-three percent of males have tried marijuana, compared with 39% of females. Males are also more likely to be current users (24% vs. 19%). Nine percent of males are current heavy users, compared with 5% of females.

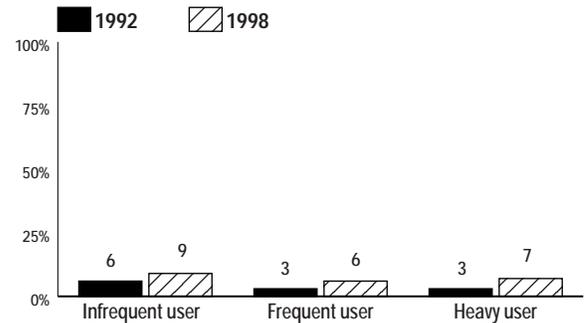
Use of marijuana increases with age. Only 11% of students aged 14 years and under say they are current users, while 31% of students 17 years and older are current users.

Marijuana use is more common among youth who live outside Greater Vancouver. Seventeen percent of Greater Vancouver youth are current users, compared with 24% of youth outside the Vancouver region.

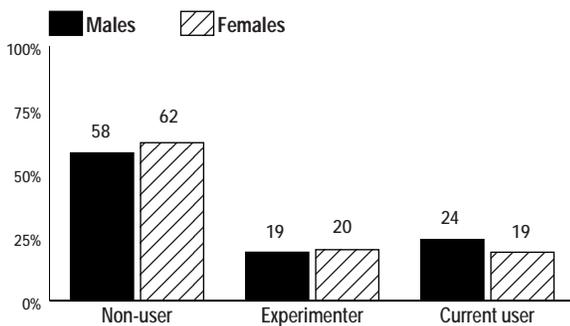
Marijuana Use



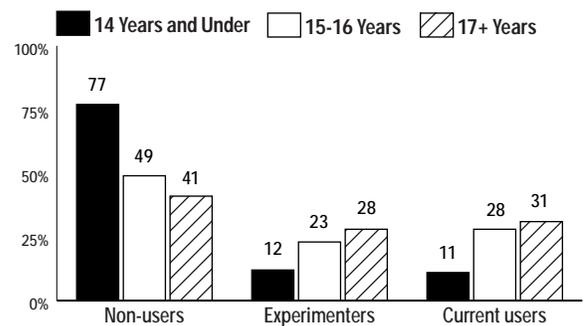
Current Users



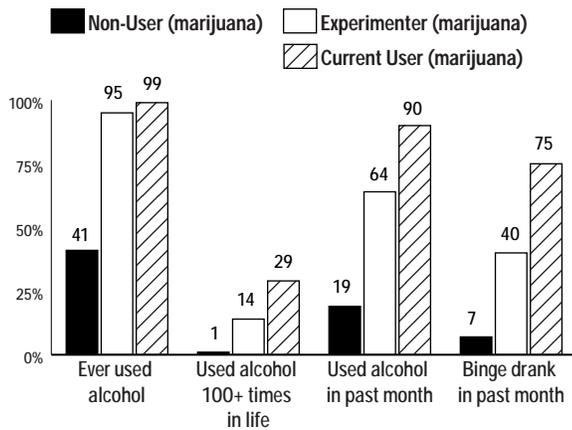
Marijuana Use by Gender



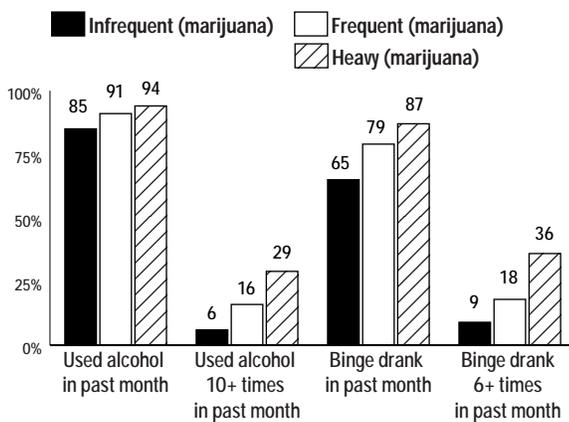
Marijuana Use by Age



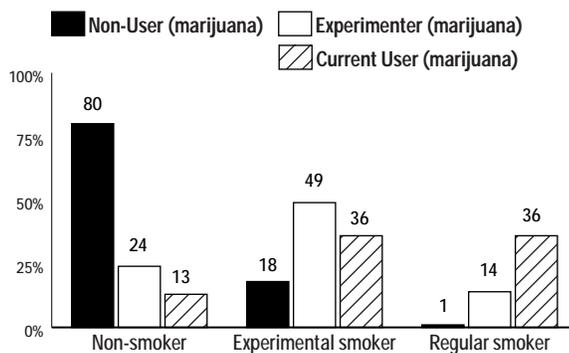
Marijuana and Alcohol Use



Alcohol Use Among Current Marijuana Users



Marijuana and Tobacco Use



Marijuana and Other Substance Use

Use of marijuana is strongly related to use of other substances. Almost all students (97%) who have tried marijuana have also tried alcohol. As marijuana use increases, so does alcohol use. Among current marijuana users, 90% say they also used alcohol in the past month.

Eighty-seven percent of current heavy marijuana users and 65% of current infrequent users also report binge drinking in the past month. Binge drinking is defined as consuming five or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours.

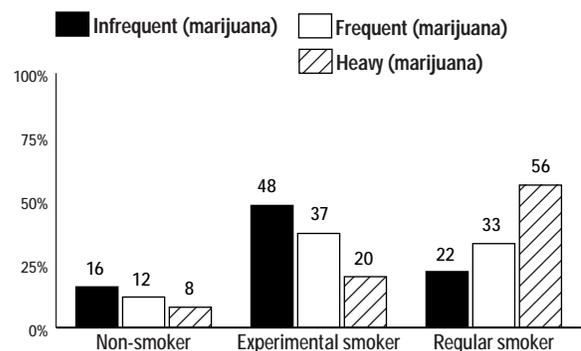
Over-three quarters of youth (82%) who have tried marijuana have also tried tobacco. Among students who have never tried marijuana, only 20% have tried tobacco. Fifty-six percent of heavy marijuana users are regular tobacco smokers, versus 22% of infrequent current users.

In terms of multiple substance use in the past month, about two-thirds of current marijuana users also used alcohol and tobacco. Only 5% of current marijuana users did not drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes in the past month.

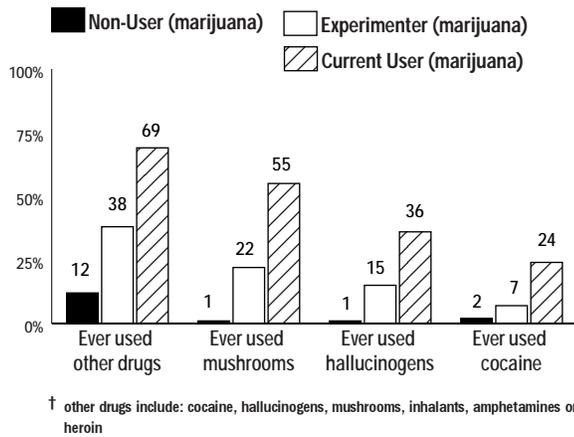
Substances Used in Past Month by Current Marijuana Users

Used marijuana only	5%
Used marijuana and tobacco	5%
Used marijuana and alcohol	26%
Used marijuana, tobacco and alcohol	64%

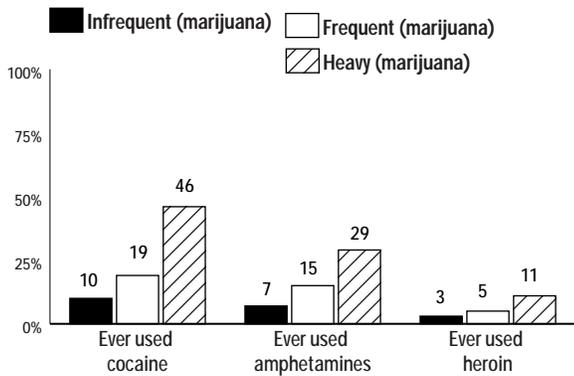
Tobacco Use Among Current Marijuana Users



Marijuana and Other Drug Use



Other Drug Use Among Current Marijuana Users



Use of marijuana is also associated with the use of other illegal drugs. Among current marijuana users, 55% have used mushrooms, 36% have used hallucinogens and 24% have used cocaine.

Marijuana and Other Risk Behaviours

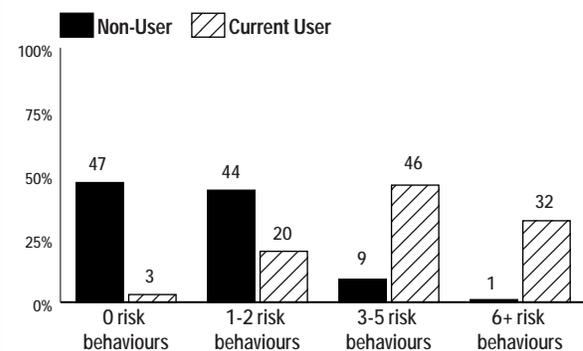
Marijuana use is associated with increases in other risk behaviours. Compared to non-users, current users are more likely to be sexually active (57% vs. 7%). They also are more likely to be involved in fights (47% vs. 22%), to carry a weapon to school (19% vs. 5%), and to drive after using alcohol or drugs (71% vs. 9%).

Students who use marijuana are more likely to take risks in many areas of their lives. Marijuana users are much more likely than non-users to have engaged in several risky activities. Of 12 health risks covered by the survey—including smoking, not using condoms and binge drinking—only 3% of current marijuana users had engaged in none of the risky behaviours, while 78% had engaged in three or more.

Marijuana and Risk Behaviours

	Non-User	Current User
Sexual Health		
Ever had sex	7%	57%
Had sex before age 14	2%	19%
Violence		
Involved in 1+ physical fights in past year	22%	47%
Carried weapon to school in past month	5%	19%
Driving		
Ever driven after using alcohol/ drugs (of licensed drivers)	9%	71%
Rode with drinking driver in past month	12%	50%

Marijuana and Multiple Risk Behaviours†



† multiple risk behaviours include: skipped school in past month; other illegal drug use; binge drinking in past month; regular smoker; driven after alcohol or drug use; sexual intercourse before age 14; 4+ sexual partners in life; no condom use last time had sex; considered suicide in past year; attempted suicide in past year; 1+ physical fights in past year; did not exercise in past week.

Physical and Emotional Health

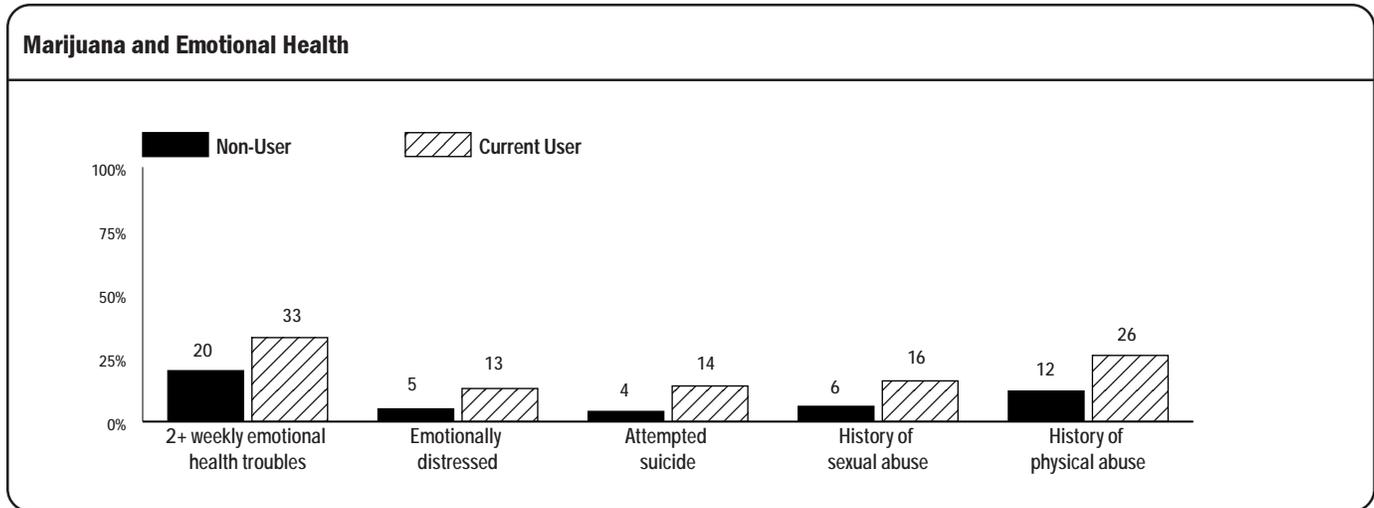
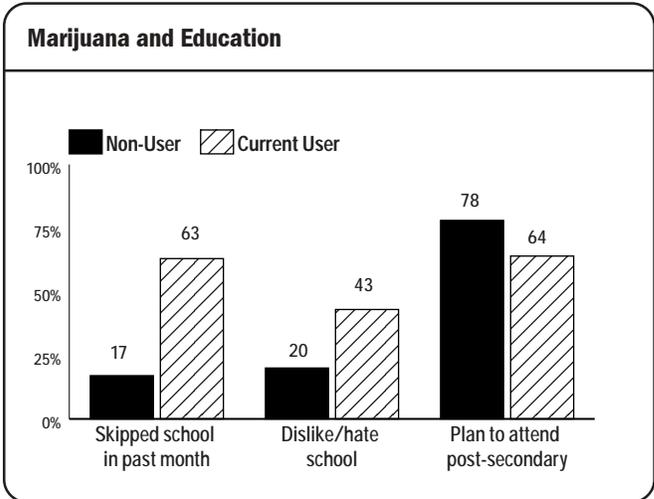
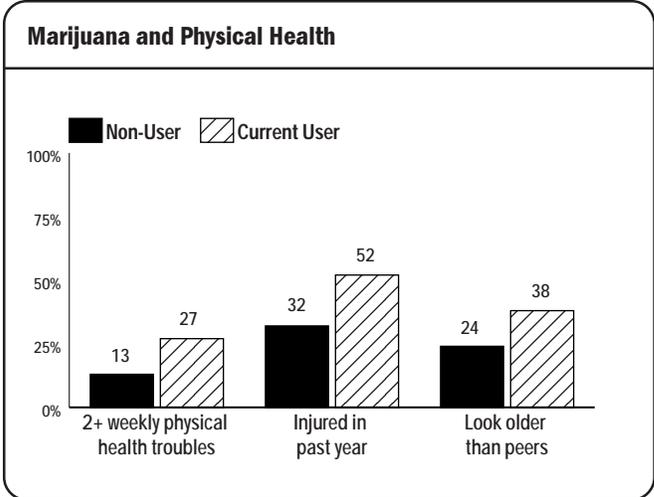
Compared to non-users, current marijuana users report more physical health troubles, such as headaches, back aches and stomach problems. Thirteen percent of non-users report two or more physical health troubles weekly, compared with 27% of current marijuana users. Users of marijuana are also more likely to sustain injuries. Over half (52%) of current users say they had a serious injury in the past year, compared with less than a third (32%) of non-users.

Current users are more likely to think they look older than other students the same age. Youth who think they look older than their peers have been shown to engage in more risk behaviours than those who think they look their age.

Current marijuana users also experience more emotional health troubles. They are more likely than non-users to be emotionally distressed, to have attempted suicide, and to have a history of sexual and physical abuse.

Marijuana and Education

Students who like and do well in school are less likely to use marijuana. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of students who see themselves as being above average students have never used marijuana, while only 13% of current marijuana users rate their school performance as above average. Non-users also are less likely than current users to have skipped school in the past month and are more likely to have plans to continue their education after high school.



Family and “School Connectedness”

The 1998 Adolescent Health Survey asked students to answer a series of questions about “connectedness,” a term used to describe feelings about their connections with others, including relationships with friends, family and school. These questions were designed to look at how a young person’s social environment affects overall health.

Students who feel highly connected to their families and school are much less likely to be current users of marijuana. Among students with high levels of family and school connectedness, 79% have never used marijuana.

This part of the survey results shows that families and schools continue to have an important influence on the choices young people make about their lives.

Marijuana Use Among Young Adolescents

Most younger adolescents in the province have never tried marijuana. Among youth aged 12 to 14 years, 77% have never used marijuana, while 33% have used it one or more times.

Young adolescents who have tried marijuana are much more likely than those their age who have not tried marijuana to engage in a range of other risk behaviours. These young teens also are less likely to have high levels of family and school connectedness.

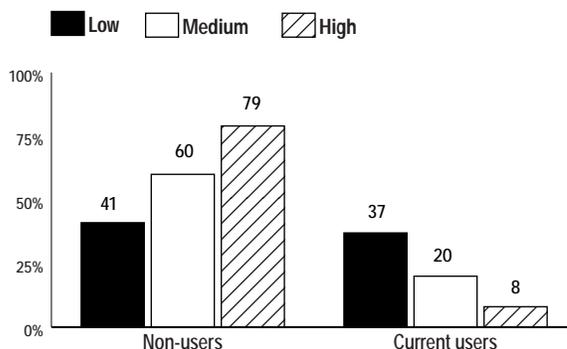
Profile of Younger Youth (12-14 years)

	Never Used Marijuana	Used Marijuana
Tried cigarettes before age 11	5%	30%
Tried alcohol	32%	93%
Ever had sex	4%	31%
Physical fights in past year	27%	52%
3+ risk behaviours†	7%	51%
High family connectedness	20%	8%
High school connectedness	19%	5%

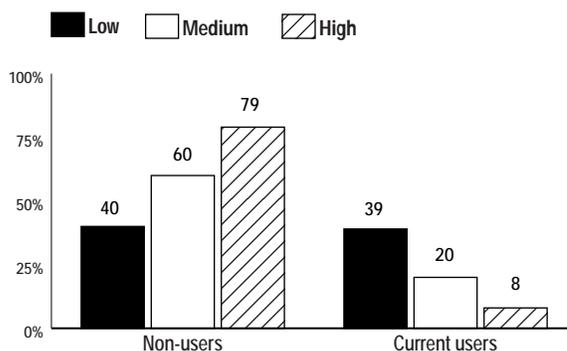
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Connectedness and Marijuana Use

Family Connectedness



School Connectedness



Older Youth and Non-Use of Marijuana

By grade 12, the majority of students have tried marijuana. Of students aged 17 years or more, 59% have used marijuana.

Older students who have never tried marijuana are more likely than older students who have tried marijuana to:

- speak a language other than English at home
- consider themselves to be very religious
- be highly connected to school and family.

Willingness to experiment with or to use marijuana varies among different population groups. Students from Chinese family backgrounds, for example, are less likely than those from other ethnic groups to have tried marijuana by Grade 12.

Profile of Older Youth (17+ years)		
	Never Used Marijuana	Used Marijuana
Speak a language other than English at home more than half the time	33%	6%
Very religious	18%	7%
High family connectedness	15%	7%
High school connectedness	14%	9%

The McCreary Centre Society AHS Reports

Healthy Connections: Listening to BC Youth (1999)

1999/2000

Making Choices: Sex, Ethnicity & BC Youth (2000)

Raven's Children: Aboriginal Youth Health in BC (2000)

Mirror Images: Weight Issues Among BC Youth (2000)

Lighting Up: Tobacco Use Among BC youth (2000)

Silk Road to Health: A Journey to Understanding Chinese Youth in BC (2000)

Next Step Workshop Toolkit (2000)

Aboriginal Next Step Workshop Toolkit (2000)

Regional Reports for AHS II

Reports are available for 11 Ministry for Children and Families' regions and 16 Ministry of Health Regions.

Other Fact Sheets Available

Silk Road: Health of Chinese Youth in BC

Lighting Up: Tobacco Use Among BC Youth

Mirror Images: Weight Issues Among BC Youth

Safe & Sound: Injury Issues Among BC Youth

Keeping Fit: Physical Activity Among BC Youth

Healthy Connections: Connectedness & BC Youth



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