

Marijuana Use

AMONG BC YOUTH

Survey Questions

The 2003 Adolescent Health Survey asked students in BC if they had ever used marijuana, how recently, and frequently they used. Based on the answers, adolescents were categorized as:

- A **non-user** has never used marijuana.
- An **experimental user** has used marijuana at least once, but not in the previous month.
- A **current user** has used marijuana one or more times in the past month. Current users were further divided into:
 - *Infrequent users* who used marijuana one to two times in the past month
 - *Frequent users* who used it three to nine times
 - *Heavy users* who used marijuana 10 or more times
- Studies in the U.S. and Canada show regular marijuana use causes respiratory problems, interferes with memory, ability to learn and academic performance, and increases the risk of injury.

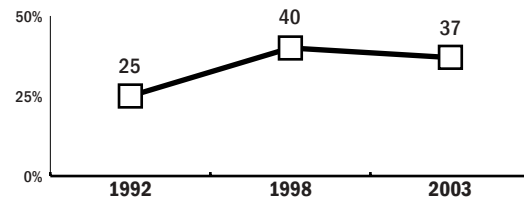
This fact sheet is one of a series on various health issues among BC youth, and may be copied for use as a handout. Data for the fact sheets were collected in the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey III, a 140-question survey completed by over 30,500 students in grades seven to twelve, in schools throughout 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.

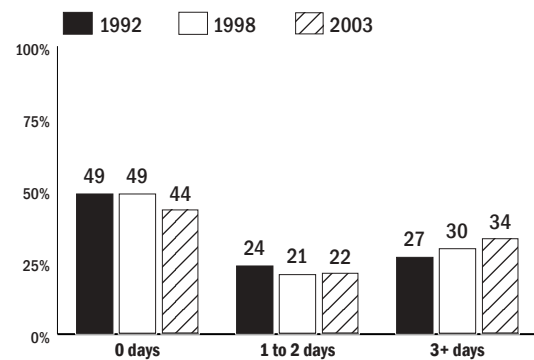
Trends in Marijuana Use

- Overall, marijuana use among adolescents increased between 1992 and 2003, from 25% to 37%. But the number of youth who ever used marijuana decreased 3% between 1998 and 2003, following an increase from 25% to 40% between 1992 and 1998.
- Still, among youth who have used marijuana the percentage of youth who used three or more times in the past month increased from 30% in 1998, to 34% in 2003.

Ever Used Marijuana (2003)



Marijuana Use in Past Month (of youth who have used marijuana) (2003)



Prevalence of Marijuana Use

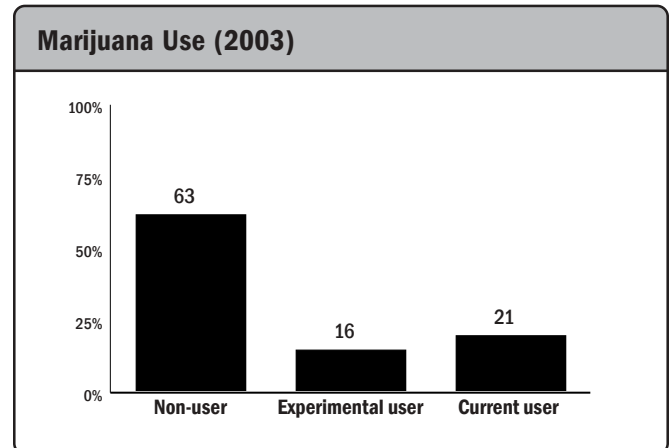
- The majority of adolescents (63%) did not use marijuana in 2003.
- 16% were experimental users, and 21% were current users (with 8% infrequent users, 5% frequent users, and 7% heavy users).
- Males and females were equally likely to have used marijuana (38% compared to 37%), but males were slightly more likely to be current users (22% vs. 20%).
- Males were more likely than females to be heavy users of marijuana (9% vs. 5%).
- The number of students who had ever used marijuana increased as teens got older, from 20% of those 14 and younger, to 45% of 15 and 16 year olds, and 56% of teens 17 and older.
- Similarly, the percentage of current marijuana users increased with age, from 10% of those 14 years and younger, to 26% of 15 to 16 year olds, and 32% of those 17 and older.
- Among adolescents who have used marijuana, most first tried between the ages of 13 and 14. But heavy users were more likely to first try marijuana at a young age: 12% had used the drug at 10 or younger, compared to 3% of experimental, infrequent and frequent users.

Marijuana Use by Age (2003)			
	Non-users	Experimental users	Current users
14 years and younger	80%	9%	10%
15-16 years	55%	19%	26%
17+ years	44%	24%	32%

Ever Used Marijuana by Region (2003)	
Greater Vancouver	29%
Capital	45%
Interior	45%
Kootenays	51%
Upper Island	46%
Northwest	47%
Northeast	47%

Geography

- Marijuana use varied across the province:
 - o Greater Vancouver had the lowest rate of marijuana use at 29%.
 - o The Kootenays region had the highest rate at 51%.



Marijuana Use - Males vs. Females (2003)		
	Males	Females
Non-user	62%	63%
Experimented with marijuana	16%	17%
Current marijuana user:		
Infrequent user	7%	9%
Frequent user	5%	6%
Heavy user	9%	5%

Age When First Tried Marijuana (of youth who have used marijuana) (2003)				
	First tried marijuana at...			
	10 years and younger	11-12 years	13-14 years	15+ years
Experimental users	3%	14%	49%	35%
Infrequent users	3%	13%	52%	32%
Frequent users	3%	20%	55%	22%
Heavy users	12%	29%	45%	14%

Other Substance Use Among Current and Non-Users of Marijuana (2003)

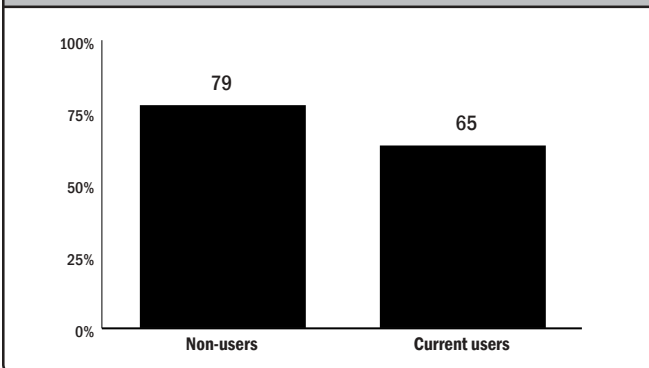
	Non-users	Current users
Current smoker	<1%	25%
Used alcohol 10+ times in past month	1%	15%
Binge drinking in past month [†]	7%	75%
Used other drugs 3+ times in life [‡]	3%	30%

†=Binge drinking was defined as having 5 or more drinks in a row within a couple of hours
‡=Other drugs include cocaine, heroin, amphetamines, mushrooms, hallucinogens, inhalants, injections, steroids, and prescription drugs

Emotional Health Among Current and Non-Users of Marijuana (2003)

	Non-users	Current users
Ever physically abused	11%	23%
Ever sexually abused	5%	14%
Serious emotional distress in past month	6%	12%
Considered suicide in past year	12%	25%
Attempted suicide in past year	4%	13%

Plan to Complete Post-Secondary Education Among Current and Non-Users of Marijuana (2003)



Risk Factors

- Marijuana use is associated with other types of substance use. Adolescents who currently used marijuana were more likely to:
 - Be current smokers
 - Drink alcohol on 10 or more days in the previous month
 - Binge drink in the past month
 - Use other illegal drugs three or more times in their life
- Marijuana use is also associated with emotional problems. Current marijuana users were more likely than those who never used marijuana to have:
 - Experienced physical and/or sexual abuse
 - Experienced severe emotional distress
 - Considered and/or attempted suicide in the past year
- In addition, marijuana users were far more likely to have run away from home in the previous year (20%) than non users (4%).

Protective Factors

- Marijuana users were less likely to be connected to their families and school:
 - Current marijuana users had a family connectedness score of .70, compared to a score of .81 for non users, and a school connectedness score of .59, compared to .70 for non users.
 - 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, take fewer risks, and have higher educational aspirations.
- 65% of current marijuana users had goals for post-secondary education, compared to 79% of non users.

Marijuana Use and Connectedness (2003)

	Non-users	Experimental users	Current users
Average Family Connectedness Score [†]	0.81	0.75	0.70
Average School Connectedness Score [†]	0.70	0.64	0.59

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