

Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, January, 2018

January

 I like January and also winter. I like getting “through” the holidays and I always like getting back to a routine and having things a bit quieter after a busy holiday season. I always have a lot of energy and think of the new year as a time to have “fresh” beginnings and even make a few resolutions.

Some of these resolutions can involve prevention initiatives for communities, schools and parents. One resolution that would be helpful is to visit powertotheparent.org, an excellent prevention resource. It is a valuable educational tool to help parents talk to their child in a meaningful way about difficult topics. The site also gives updates on topics related to alcohol and other drug use by teens.

The website also contains a list of coalitions. The new year might be the time for parents and other community members to consider joining their local coalition. Westchester County has active coalitions in 25 communities and all are welcoming to new members and new ideas.

If your community does not have a substance abuse prevention coalition and you might be interested in starting one, call me at 332-1300 for additional information.

Editor: Patricia Murphy Warble, LCSW, CPP

The Latest Teen Substance Use Data

Every year in December the results about drug use in 8th, 10th and 12th graders are published in the annual Monitoring the Future (MTF) study, now in its 43rd year. The national study is designed and conducted by research scientists at the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Marijuana

Researchers at the University of Michigan were not surprised that marijuana use among adolescents had the first significant increase in seven years. The perception of harm for marijuana has declined among young people as more states legalize marijuana and approved the use of marijuana for medicinal reasons. Overall, past-year use of marijuana significantly increased to 24% in 2017 for 8th, 10th, and 12th graders combined. Specifically, in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades the respective rates of use were 10.1%, to 25.5% and to 37.1%. The increase is statistically significant when all three grades are combined.

“This increase has been expected by many” said Richard Miech, the Principal Investigator of the study. “Historically marijuana use has gone up as adolescents see less risk of harm in using it. We’ve found that the risk adolescents see in marijuana use has been steadily going down for years to the point that it is now at the lowest level we’ve seen in four decades.”

Vaping of Nicotine, Marijuana, and Flavoring

The 2017 survey reports for the first time, estimates of nicotine vaping, marijuana vaping, flavoring-only vaping, and any vaping. Previously, no national study has published estimates for vaping of specific substances for the standard time periods of past 30 days, past year, and lifetime.

“These findings emphasize that vaping has progressed well beyond a cigarette alternative,” said Richard Miech. “Vaping has become a new delivery device for a number of substances, and this number will likely increase in the years to come.”

Levels of marijuana vaping are considerable. One in ten 12th grade students vaped marijuana in the past year, and levels were 8% and 3% for 10th and 8th grade students, respectively. These annual levels are about the same as the levels for lifetime prevalence of vaping marijuana use, indicating that almost all marijuana vaping had occurred within one year of the survey.

Levels of nicotine vaping are also considerable, with 19% of 12th grade students vaping nicotine in the past year. The annual prevalence levels were 16% and 8% for 10th and 8th grade students, respectively. It is also possible that additional students are getting nicotine in what they vape but are not aware of it, so these estimates may be lower than the reality of use.

The percentage of students in 2017 who reported vaping flavoring, marijuana, or nicotine was similar to those who reported that they had vaped anything in 2016, with the respective percentages for use in the past 30 days at 17% in 2017 and 13% in 2016 among 12th grade students, 13% and 11% for 10th grade students, and 7% and 6% for 8th grade students.

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Cigarettes and Several Other Tobacco Products

Cigarette smoking by teens continued to decline in 2017. For the three grades combined, all measures are at the lowest point since first measured in all three grades in 1991. Since the high levels reached in the mid-1990s, lifetime prevalence has fallen by 71%, 30-day prevalence by 81%, daily prevalence by 86%, and current half-pack-a-day prevalence by 91%.

“The health implications of these dramatic declines in smoking are enormous for this generation of young people” says Lloyd Johnston, the previous director of the study. “Long-term increases in perceived risk and personal disapproval of smoking have accompanied these changes, as has a long-term drop in the perceived availability of cigarettes to these age groups.”

There has also been a continuing decline in the use of smokeless tobacco this year with 30-day prevalence reaching a low point for the three grades individually and combined.

Snus, a form of smokeless tobacco, showed a significant decline in use this year for the three grades combined.

Use of a hookah pipe to smoke tobacco had been popular with this age group but use has fallen by more than half since 2014, from 23% to 10% in 2017 for the three grades combined, including a significant decline this year of 2.9 percentage points. “The use of hookah appears to be fading out,” conclude the investigators.

Use of both flavored little cigars and regular little cigars is down a bit since first being measured in all three grades in 2014, but did not continue to decline this year. Thirty-day prevalence is at 5.4% for flavored and 3.7% for regular little cigars.

Alcohol Use Levels

Overall, alcohol use by adolescents has been in a long-term decline that actually first began in the 1980s and was interrupted for a few years during the relapse phase in the substance use epidemic in the 1990s.

In 2017, however, lifetime prevalence, annual prevalence, 30-day prevalence, and daily prevalence all showed little or no change with no significant changes for any grade or for the three grades combined. This is the first time this has happened in many years and may indicate the end of the long-term decline in adolescent alcohol use.

Binge drinking has trended down by over half from their peak rates in the mid-to-late 1990s. Binge drinking was reported as 4% of 8th graders, 10% of 10th graders and 17% of 12th graders.

The researchers point out that it is worth noting that prior to this year lifetime prevalence and annual prevalence for the three grades combined both trended down by roughly four-tenths from the peak levels of use reached in the mid-1990s; 30-day prevalence is down by about one-half since then; and daily prevalence is now down by two-thirds. “These are dramatic declines for such a culturally ingrained behavior and good news to many parents,” note the investigators. “However, we saw no further declines in 2017.”

Inhalants

Researchers report that the use of inhalants increased among 8th grade students in 2017. Inhalant use includes sniffing glue, gases, or sprays, and is an unusual type of substance use because it is more common among younger than older adolescents.

In 2017 the percent of 8th grade students who had ever used inhalants in their lifetime increased 1.2% to 8.9%, a significant increase; use in the past 12 months increased 0.9% to 4.7%, also a significant increase. This upturn may mark the end of a gradual decline that started nearly a decade earlier in 2008.

For some years MTF has warned that inhalant use is primed to increase. Perceptions of risk from using inhalants among 8th graders have been steadily declining since 2010, which is often a leading indicator of future increases in prevalence.

Any illicit drug use including inhalants also significantly increased among 8th grade students in 2017. Lifetime use increased 2.7% to 23.3% and past 12 month use increased 2.3% to 15.8%, both significant increases. These increases were driven primarily by the upturn in inhalant and marijuana use.

Heroin and Opioid Use

Heroin use by adolescents continues to be low, and did not significantly change in the 8th, 10th, or 12th grades in 2017, with annual use levels at 0.4% or lower in all three grades.

Misuse of prescription opioids is reported only for 12th grade students; it continued a decade-long decline in 2017, although this year's decline was not statistically significant.

Vicodin, which has had the highest level of use among the opioid analgesics, showed a significant decline in past 12 month use among 12th graders in 2017 from 2.9% to 2.0%. Its annual prevalence is now at the lowest levels in all three grades observed since it was first included in the study in 2002.

Implication for Prevention Initiatives

Marijuana

As the perception of harm of marijuana falls among young people, there has been concern among substance abuse prevention professionals that both adults and teens do not understand the dangers associated with this drug. To address this issue many Westchester coalitions, schools, communities and organizations, have had nationally known speakers including Berta Madras, PhD from Harvard, Ziva Cooper, PhD from Columbia, and Kevin Sabet founder of SAM: Safe Alternatives to Marijuana as their keynote speakers. Most recently the SAS conference, *When The Holidays Aren't So Happy* had Mohini Ranganathan, MD from Yale, Lynn Hernandez, Ph.D. from Brown and Amelia Arria, Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, speak to the mental health, student achievement and cultural issues associated with marijuana use.

It is critical for everyone to know the facts about the negative consequences of marijuana use and the additional consequences for youth and other vulnerable populations including those with mental health challenges

Many do not realize that today's marijuana is more potent than it was in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s so that teens who use marijuana regularly can decrease their IQ, impair their ability to learn, become addicted to marijuana, and if teens use marijuana and drive, they are twice as likely to have a crash. When accurate information is shared and adults and teens believe marijuana use can be harmful, fewer teens will use marijuana.

Vaping

This trend caught many adults by surprise as it became popular with teens in a short period of time and most communities were not prepared to deal with its use. Many adults were unaware of what vaping devices looked like or knew what they did as there was no smell associated with their use. In addition, the paraphilia associated with vaping changes all the time and looks like common objects that are used daily. In fact, currently a popular vape pen, called a Juul actually looks like a USB drive so no one had a clue that it could be used to vape a substance, often in a school setting.

To help community members see the vaping devices and other paraphernalia that students may have in their room, Judy Mezey of SAS, has designed an informative presentation along with a virtual teenage room. Judy is available to bring this to communities to educate parents about vaping and to alert them to other objects that may be in a teen's room that look innocent but are actually associated with the use of specific drug or the endorsement of a drug culture.

In addition, the Westchester Coalition's annual event to reclaim April 20, a day that promotes the use of marijuana, as *Healthy Teen Brain Day* will feature gigantic blow-up lungs that will be an educational tool to educate students and adults about the dangers associated with vaping.

The lungs will be installed at the Westchester Medical Center and all the schools, coalitions and communities in Westchester will be invited to attend this event. It is a great opportunity to educate students and others in a hands-on and realistic manner about the vulnerability of the lungs to vaping marijuana or nicotine.

Cigarettes/Tobacco Products

The data on tobacco products is very positive but there is concern about teens vaping nicotine. There is nicotine available in flavors which is a way to attract the younger smokers and can lead to the use of cigarettes and other tobacco products. Given the long term negative health issues associated with nicotine, it is important that communities continue to educate students about the dangers of nicotine.

Alcohol

Although overall, the decreasing use of alcohol by teens has been a very favorable trend in the country, sadly, this is not reflected in the data collected in Westchester County. Our teens use alcohol at a rate that is higher than the national level. Alcohol is the drug of choice for teens in our area and the serious consequences of youth use needs to be kept at the forefront of prevention efforts.

It is important to continue educating teens about the dangers associated with binge drinking and alcohol poisoning as they can result in serious consequences including death.

Inhalants

Many teens start inhalant use by accident; they like the smell of glue, whiteout, or gasoline, take a long inhale, get high, and keep going. Attaining drugs can be somewhat of a challenge when you are in 8th grade. Inhalants are found in a variety of household products including: spray paint, nail polish remover, whiteout, marker, gasoline, glue, keyboard cleaner, shoe polish, and aerosol sprays. These products are easy to buy and relatively inexpensive, even for adolescents. Many times they can be easily found in the house, which also makes them easy to hide.

Heroin and Opioids The numbers are low for use but parents need to be vigilant if their child has a dental procedure, operation or injury that may require pain relievers. If your child needs a pain reliever monitor the frequency that your child takes the medication, keep track of the number of pills prescribed, and know the taper down protocol. Also investigate alternative medications to relieve their pain if they need an opioid. Some over-the-counter medications have been found to be very effective.

Up Coming Events

January 25th, 7pm
Byram Hills High School Theater
Vaping Information Panel
featuring Judy Mezey, Student Assistance Services, and Dr. Richard Stumacher, Northern Westchester Hospital
Co-hosted by:
North Castle Coalition.
Contact: 273-9200X4943

March 8th
Irvington High School & Middle School
Co-hosted by: iASK (Irvington About Safe Kids)
Irvington University
Kenote Speaker:
Dr. Steven Dewey MD
Contact: 914-269-5469