
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, March, 2014

Yearly Study



Each year, prevention professionals around the country eagerly anticipate the release of the Monitoring the Future results in mid-December.

The results of this longitudinal study which began in 1991, is an accurate report about the alcohol and drug use of 8th, 10th and 12th graders in our country. The results of this study are so valuable as it gives good information about trends, concerns and also successes. It is the information that guides programming and other initiatives.

This year there is continued good news about alcohol in that its use has declined in the past few years. However, one can argue that it is still very high in terms of overall use by our young people.

The major concern right now in our county is the increased misuse of prescription drugs and the use of heroin by young adults. Most are getting involved with heroin as a result of getting addicted to prescription drugs. Once they cannot afford or secure prescription drugs, they are turning to heroin.

The number young people using this potent drug is small, but the effects are devastating as many end up dying from an overdose.

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Monitoring the Future, 2013

The University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future (MTF) study, is funded annually by the National Institute of Drug Abuse and since 1991 has surveyed 40,000 to 50,000 students in three grades (8, 10 and 12). The main headline of this year's MTF survey is that the use of synthetic marijuana by teens has dropped substantially this year, and an increasing proportion of them see great risk in using what are called "bath salts." Both of these drugs are synthetics and are sold over the counter in many outlets such as gas stations and convenience stores, as well as on the Internet. They have been the subject of great concern because of their serious and unpredictable consequences for the user's health.

Another message is that parents, educators, and others must continue to help our teens understand the health risks of alcohol and other drugs. During spring break and college visits, Westchester teens are more likely to interact with teens from other areas and be exposed to substances they have never used. Therefore it's important to discuss the risks of drugs with teens to make sure they have accurate information.

Synthetic Marijuana

The use of synthetic marijuana in the past year has dropped sharply from 11.3 percent in 2012 to 7.9 percent in 2013 among 12th graders, from 8.8 percent to 7.4 percent among 10th graders, and from 4.4 percent to 4.0 percent among 8th graders. Synthetic marijuana, sold under many names but most frequently as K-2 or Spice has been of increasing concern because of its adverse effects and high rates of use. In 2012, synthetic marijuana was the second-most widely used illicit drug among 10th and 12th graders (after marijuana), and the third-most widely used among 8th graders (after marijuana and inhalants). Synthetic marijuana is made by spraying synthetically produced cannabinoids (chemical elements found in cannabis) on herbs or other plant materials. It is usually sold over-the-counter of gas stations or mini-marts.

Bath Salts

So-called "bath salts" are among the latest designer drugs. Questions on the use of these powerful and dangerous stimulant drugs have been included since the 2012 survey; that year the percent who reported any use in the prior 12 months were 0.8 percent, 0.6 percent and 1.3 percent for grades 8, 10 and 12, respectively. This year, the rates have remained very low at 1 percent, 0.9 percent and 0.9 percent.

In all three grades the proportions of students who say the use of bath salts

involves great risk to the user have increased sharply. The investigators say that this “perception of harm” very likely helps to explain why the use of these drugs has remained at such low levels. In a single year, the percent indicating that occasional use carries great risk of harm has risen by 13, 17 and 25 percentage points in grades 8, 10 and 12, respectively. Unlike synthetic marijuana, which experienced a substantial rise in popularity, use of bath salts has remained quite contained, suggesting that the messages about its dangers have been received.

Bath salts are linked to a number of serious side effects, including paranoia, suicidal thoughts, violent behavior, hallucinations and increased heart rate. Calls to poison control centers about bath salts reportedly jumped from around 300 in 2010 to more than 6,000 in 2011. Since then, the number of calls has fallen to 2,700 in 2012 and continues to decline sharply, quite likely due to widespread publicity about the dangers of bath salts.

Marijuana

The use of marijuana among teens has been increasing in recent years following a decade or more of steady decline. In 2013, use among 8th and 10th graders has increased though not enough to reach statistical significance. Annual prevalence has risen from 11.4 percent to 12.7 % among 8th graders and from 28.0 % to 29.8 % among 10th graders, while among 12th graders, use has held steady at 36.4 %.

Lloyd Johnston, the lead researcher commented, **“Perceived risk, namely the risk to the user that**

teenagers associate with a drug, has been a lead indicator of use, both for marijuana and other drugs, and it has continued its sharp decline in 2013 among teens. This could foretell further increases in use in the future.”

From 2005 to 2013, the percent seeing great risk from being a regular marijuana user has fallen among 8th graders from 74 % to 61%, among 10th graders from 66% to 47 % and among 12th graders from 58 % to 40 %.

The researchers reported an interesting finding this year which relates to the substantial number of states that have passed medical marijuana laws. Of the 12th graders who say that they have used marijuana in the 12 months prior to the survey and who reside in states that passed such laws by the end of the year prior to the survey, a third (34 %) say that one of their sources of marijuana is another person's medical marijuana prescription. And 6 % say they get it from their own prescription.

This would indicate that state medical marijuana laws provide an additional avenue of accessibility to the drug for teens. These findings are based on self-reports from 12th graders surveyed in the 2012 and 2013 surveys combined.

Daily use of marijuana, which also has been rising in recent years for all three grades, remains essentially flat at relatively high levels between 2012 and 2013. The prior increases were substantial, up by a quarter to

one-half compared to the low points reached between 2006 and 2008 for the three grades. Today, one in every 15 high school seniors (6.5 %) is a daily or near-daily marijuana user. The comparable percentages among 8th and 10th graders are 1.1% and 4.0 %, respectively.

Narcotic Drugs

The use of narcotic drugs other than heroin, most of which are prescription analgesics, has increased sharply among young adults in recent years, as have emergency room admissions and overdose deaths involving their use, making this class of drugs of particular concern. The MFS study only reports use of this class of drugs for 12th graders.

However there is good news regarding teen use as after showing a considerable rise in use from 1992 to 2000, annual prevalence for narcotics leveled off through 2009, and has since been in decline. The decline continues into 2013, though the one-year decline is not significant.

OxyContin, Vicodin.

Two of the most commonly used narcotic drugs are OxyContin and Vicodin. The 12th graders show a significant decrease in Vicodin use and a nonsignificant decrease in OxyContin use in 2013, consistent with the decline in use of the general category of narcotic drugs. The lower grades do not show parallel declines in 2013 for either of these drugs; however, use in both grades is well below peak levels.

Annual prevalence rates among 8th, 10th and 12th grades for

OxyContin are now 2.0 %, 3.4 % and 3.6 %, and for Vicodin, they are 1.4 %, 4.6 % and 5.3 % in the three grades. These rates are one-quarter to one-half below what they were in recent peak years.

This is good news, however, the issue of concern is that the path to heroin use by young people usually begins with drugs like Oxycontin or Vicodin. Once these narcotic drugs are no longer available or too expensive to secure, young people turn to heroin as a cheaper "high" or to keep from going into withdrawal.

Use of Any Prescription Drug without Medical Supervision

In 2013, 21.5 % indicate use of prescription drugs without a doctor's orders in their lifetime, while 15.0 % indicate such use in the past year. In 2008 these rates were 21.5 % and 15.4 % respectively.

The sources of prescription drugs remain primarily informal networks of friends and, to a lesser extent, relatives. In the years 2009–2013 combined, among past-year users of amphetamines, 56 % are "given by a friend", 43 % are "bought from a friend" and 20 % are "bought from a drug dealer or stranger." Among past-year users of tranquilizers, the same three sources top the list at 55 %, 39 % and 24 %, respectively. Among past-year users of narcotics other than heroin, these three sources are 51%, 33 % and 18 %, respectively. However, the response "from a prescription I had" ranks second at 37 %. So it appears that for narcotics other than heroin, having leftover pills from an earlier prescription is a significant source

to get pills and take them without medical supervision.

Alcohol

Alcohol use by teens has dropped dramatically over the past two decades especially among the youngest teens and these usage rates continued to drop in 2013. The 30-day prevalence of alcohol use declined in all three grades in 2013, dropping 0.8, 1.9 and 2.3 percentage points in grades 8, 10 and 12. The 12th-grade decline is statistically significant as is the decline for the three grades combined.

All three grades are now at the lowest point that they have been at least since the mid-1990s, and likely longer. Among 8th graders, most of whom are 13 or 14 years old, the proportion who have ever taken "more than just a few sips" of alcohol by 8th grade has fallen by half since the 1990s.

Prevalence of recent binge drinking, having five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks, has dropped in 2013 by 1.9 percentage points in 10th grade and by 1.6 percentage points in 12th grade, while 8th-grader use remains unchanged. As with 30-day prevalence, all grades are at their lowest points since at least the mid-1990s.

The two-week prevalence rates for binge drinking are now at 5.1% , 13.7 % and 22.1 % in the three grades, down from peak levels. Despite the declines in prevalence of binge drinking, *perceived risk* of that behavior has actually fallen a little in all three grades in 2013. *Disapproval* of binge drinking continues a

gradual increase in the upper grades; and perceived *availability* for alcohol continues to decline.

Summary

The following is the summary of this year's findings from the MTF website in regard to results and trends.: "The overall story this year is that young people seem to be getting the message that designer drugs like synthetic marijuana and bath salts are dangerous. Synthetic drugs are particularly dangerous because their ingredients are unknown, they have not been tested for safety, and their ever-changing ingredients can be unusually powerful," Johnston said. "Users really don't know what they are getting and, as the thousands of calls to the nation's poison control centers relating to these drugs indicate, their effects can be very harmful."

The use of most illicit drugs among the nation's teenagers is either holding steady from last year or showing some modest decline.

Alcohol use and binge drinking are continuing their long term declines in 2013, reaching their lowest points in the history of the study.

One important question for the future is whether the decline in perceived risk of marijuana use will lead to increased marijuana prevalence in the coming years, as it has in the past. Another is whether the legalization of recreational marijuana use in states like Colorado and

Washington will affect marijuana attitudes and behaviors among youth more generally.

Heroin 2014

The tragic death of Phillip Seymour Hoffman has brought increased attention to heroin use. The availability of low cost high potency heroin, and recent heroin related deaths of young adults in Westchester County and throughout the Northeast is causing worry and distress. Even though only 1.0% of high school seniors report lifetime use, the risk of heroin related death is great for any young person who uses, even once. In fact, the potency of available heroin is particularly dangerous for first time users and those in recovery who relapse.

What everyone needs to know:

A recent study indicated that almost 80% of people who recently started to use heroin said they had previously used prescription painkillers illegally. (SAMHSA 2013)

45% of high school students who abused prescription drugs reported they used the painkillers to relieve physical pain. (McCabe, Boyd, et al., 2009)

The most common sources for youth to obtain medication are from friends or family for free (33%-50%) or from a physician (22.2%). (Schepis & Krishnan-Sarin, 2009)

Until their heroin use becomes known to a

parent, very few parents believe their children misuse prescription drugs or use heroin. Therefore, few parents have discussed the dangers of prescription drug misuse and heroin with their children.

While most of the deaths have involved recent HS graduates, heroin is available to HS students. It is often less expensive and easier to obtain than prescription painkillers for some youth.

Signs of use can include constricted (pin-dot) pupils, loss of weight, and missing money. Withdrawal can include flu like symptoms, nausea, and cramps.

Narcan, the antidote for heroin overdose, can be administered by a parent and is available through Sancia Health Care in White Plains (914) 421-0400.

What parents need to do:

!Keep prescription medication out of easy access. Get rid of unused medication. Many police departments have permanent Med Return Units where unused/unwanted prescriptions can be disposed. Visit [<http://powertotheparent.org/toolkit/how-to-discard-unused-medication/>] for a list of sites in Westchester.

Talk to your teen. Use media coverage of celebrity addiction to engage your children in conversation.

If your child is prescribed painkillers for oral surgery, a sports injury, or any other reason, speak to both your teen and your teen's physician about preventive

Express your concerns to your teen and "trust your gut." You know your child best. If you think something is wrong, it might not be drug use, but there may be something troubling your child.

Seek out consultation if your concern persists. Not all adolescent angst is part of normative mood swings.

If your teen is misusing prescription drugs or using heroin, free consultation for parents is available at Student Assistance Services (914) 332-1300.

Upcoming Events

March 25, 7:30 - 9:00 pm

Ardley High School

Update on Marijuana

Bertha Madras, Ph.D

Professor of Psychobiology,
Harvard

Medical School

Call: 914-283-2016

April 4, 6:30 to 9:00pm

Westchester Institute for

Human Development, 20

Hospital Service Rd, S,

Valhalla

Marijuana Legalization Issues

Evidence Gathered,

Lessons Learned

Kevin A. Sabet, Ph.D.

Call: 914-332-1300