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Alcohol, tobacco use down among teens; marijuana, e-cigarettes of concern
Healthy Youth Survey results explore attitudes, behaviors among students in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades

OLYMPIA — While more Washington teens consider alcohol use risky, fewer teens consider marijuana use to be risky according to recent results from the state Healthy Youth Survey. State leaders are concerned because research shows that when the perceived risk from using substances goes down, substance use typically goes up.

“Teens who avoid substance use are less likely to use as adults, and that can lead to a longer, healthier life — one of the top goals of my [Healthiest Next Generation](#) initiative. It’s vital that every child in our state has the opportunity to grow up healthy. Our future, and theirs, depends on it,” said Gov. Jay Inslee.

The Healthy Youth Survey is taken every two years by students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 in almost 1,000 public schools in Washington. More than 200,000 youth took part in the survey in October 2014 by answering a wide variety of questions about their health and health behaviors. All responses were voluntary and anonymous.

While past-month use of alcohol and all other drugs have continued to trend down, marijuana use – 18 percent among high school sophomores – did not change. Rates for drinking among sophomores dropped 11 percent in 2014 compared to 2008 (from 32 percent to 21 percent). Marijuana use is more than double the rate of cigarette-use (eight percent).

“It’s great news that our investments in proven prevention strategies are working to keep most youth alcohol and drug-free,” said Kevin W. Quigley, Secretary of the state Department of Social and Health Services. “Underage drinking, a leading contributor to injury and death among youth, has gone down significantly since 2008. However, with one in five 10th graders using alcohol and marijuana regularly, we have much more work to do with school and community partners to protect the health and safety of our young people.”

Similarly, driving under the influence is a concern. Although fewer sophomores reported riding in cars with drinking drivers (24 percent in 2008 compared to 18 percent in 2014), and drinking and driving dropped from 6 percent in 2008 to 5 percent, currently, almost one in five (19

percent) high school sophomores reported riding in a car with a driver who had been using marijuana, and one in six (17 percent) high school seniors reported driving a car within three hours of using marijuana.

The perception of risk for using tobacco remained flat, and the long downward trend for smoking continued among all grades in the 2014 survey. Young people in certain racial and ethnic populations, however, continue to smoke at higher rates, and there's concern about electronic-cigarette use among all youth. The 2014 survey shows high prevalence of "e-cigarette" use among Washington kids with almost one in five 10th graders saying they'd used the products in the past 30 days. National data indicates many kids try e-cigarettes for the first time without ever having tried tobacco.

"We've got to ring the alarm bell because teens are telling us in their own terms that they don't consider marijuana use to be risky and because they're being duped to start 'vaping,'" said Secretary of Health John Wiesman. "We've got to take the lessons learned about tactics that helped curb tobacco and alcohol use and put them to good use educating our kids about risks of using other substances. This includes passing laws limiting youth access to vaping products and funding education campaigns to prevent under-age use of marijuana."

Most students in the survey – 68 percent of sophomores – said they don't use any substances, and the tobacco and alcohol trends are encouraging. But current use rates of all substances are still a concern, especially emerging trends related to marijuana and electronic cigarettes. Teens who use marijuana, tobacco, or alcohol are more likely to use more than one substance, and are at higher risk for addiction than teens who delay alcohol and other drug use until 21 or older.

"Why do we do this survey? Because students are willing to share what's going on in their lives," said Randy Dorn, superintendent of public instruction. "This isn't filtered through parents or educators; it's coming directly from students. And what they tell us is very important. It gives us insights into what they're thinking and what concerns them. From that, we are able to provide relevant programs and services that can help them be more successful."

Together state agencies, local partners, and schools will continue to use these results to inform prevention initiatives aimed at improving teen health and learning. Parental and community

support also is needed to keep alcohol, marijuana, and e-cigarettes out of the hands of kids, and to provide a healthy home and community environment. Information on [ways to prevent youth substance use and get involved](#) in your community is available online.

“We at the Liquor Control Board are very encouraged that underage drinking is continuing on a downward trend thanks to the coordinated efforts and ongoing commitment of our statewide partners,” said Liquor Control Board Chair Jane Rushford. “The percentage of parents who talk with their kids about not drinking continues to increase. Research strongly supports that parents are the number one influence on whether their kids choose to drink.”

The Healthy Youth Survey results provide state and local health organizations with needed information to plan, implement, and evaluate publicly-funded programs. The survey is a collaborative effort of the Department of Health, Department of Social and Health Services, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Liquor Control Board. Survey results are posted on [the Healthy Youth Survey home page, AskHYS](#).

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