



2016 Monitoring the Future Highlights

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) released the *2016 Monitoring the Future (MTF)* annual survey this week. A Dec. 13 webinar which reviewed the findings, brought together the experts on this important topic – Nora D. Volkow, M.D. Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse; Michael Botticelli, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy; Lloyd D. Johnston, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan; and Richard A. Miech, Ph.D., Research Professor, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

Presenters indicated that there is a continued long-term decline in the use of many illicit drugs in 2016 – including marijuana – as well as reductions in misuse of alcohol, tobacco and prescription medications. Overall, 45,473 students from across the United States in grades 8, 10 and 12 from 372 public and private schools participated in this year's MTF survey.

Specific findings of interest to coalitions include:

Illicit Drugs

- Use of *any* illicit drug this past year is the lowest in the survey's history among eighth grade students.
- Past year use of illicit drugs other than marijuana are also down among all three grades. This includes declines in use of synthetic cannabinoids for students in grades 10 and 12; cocaine use among 10th graders; inhalants for those in grade eight; and MDMA (Ecstasy or Molly) use for all three grades. As the researchers noted on Dec. 13, "these drugs have fallen out of favor."
- Marijuana use perhaps is correlated with age:
 - In 2016, past month use dropped significantly among eighth graders – from 6.5 percent in 2015 to 5.4 percent. Daily use for this age group dropped from 1.1 percent in 2015 to 0.7 percent in 2016.
 - For high school seniors, rate of daily (6 percent) and past-month use (22.5 percent) remained steady.
 - While the use of marijuana remains steady for students in grade 10, the numbers are at their lowest in over two decades.
 - The survey also indicates that there are higher rates of use among high school seniors in states with medical marijuana laws (38.3 percent) as compared to states without these laws (33.3 percent).
- Cough and cold medicine misuse, which impacts younger students, is on the rise. Eighth graders report an increase in misuse of over-the-counter cough medicine at 2.6 percent, up from 1.6 percent in 2015. This increase is still less than the 4.2 percent when misuse was first measured in 2006.

- Heroin use rates among high school students still in school remain low in 2016. High school seniors report past year use of heroin (with a needle) at 0.3 percent – unchanged from 2015.

Tobacco and E-cigarettes

- Marijuana and e-cigarettes are more popular than regular cigarettes. Among high school seniors, for example, past month use of e-cigarettes is 12.4 percent and 10.5 percent for cigarettes. As indicated above, this is in comparison to 22.5 percent of seniors who used marijuana during this comparable time period.
- In 2016, there was a large drop in the use of tobacco cigarettes across all three grades. In 1991, 10.7 percent of high school seniors smoked a half pack or more per day. Fast forward 25 years, and that percentage has dropped to 1.8 percent. This success can be attributed to policy changes, as well as prevention work on the ground.
- Vaping is also going down particularly among high school seniors from 16.2 percent in 2015 to 12.4 percent this year. Interestingly, 62.8 percent say that they vape for flavor as opposed to 24.9 percent of 12th graders saying they vape for the nicotine.

Alcohol

- There has also been a significant drop in teen alcohol use, with the rate of teens reporting having “been drunk” over the past year achieving its lowest levels since the start of MTF. For example, 37.3 percent of 12th graders say they have been drunk in the past year; and 20.5 percent of 10th graders say they have been drunk, down from a peak of 41.6 percent in 2000. Eighth graders report a rate of 5.7 percent, down from a peak of 19.8 percent in 1996.
- More than half or about 55.6 percent of students in grade 12 report having used alcohol in the past year, down from 75 percent in 1997. Thirty-eight percent of 10th graders and 17.6 percent of eighth graders report past year use, compared to the peaks of 65.3 percent in 2000 among 10th graders and 46.8 percent in 1994 among eighth graders.
- Among eighth graders, binge drinking (five or more drinks in a row in the last two weeks) continue to significantly decline, in 2016 at only 3.4 percent, the lowest rate since the survey began asking about it in 1991 and down from a peak of 13.3 percent in 1996. Binge drinking among high school seniors is down to 15.5 percent, half its peak of 31.5 percent in 1998.
- Just over 71 percent of 10th graders think it is easy to get alcohol, compared to last year’s rate of 74.9 percent, and down from 90.4 percent two decades ago.

Prescription medicines

- This year's data indicates that teen misuse of prescription medicines is going down in a variety of categories including opioid pain relievers, ADHD medicines and tranquilizers.
- Similar to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, young people say they are obtaining medicines from family members and friends. They also affirm that the source of these medications is from physicians and dentists who are perhaps overprescribing. This points to educating the medical community about the importance of evaluating prescribing practices.

"Clearly our public health prevention efforts, as well as policy changes to reduce availability, are working to reduce teen drug use, especially among eighth graders," says Volkow. "However, when 6 percent of high school seniors are using marijuana daily, and new synthetics are continually flooding the illegal marketplace, we cannot be complacent."

Potential areas of future study, as indicated during the Dec. 13 webinar include:

- Confirm how significant decreases in tobacco/nicotine and alcohol use may protect children and young people from other drug misuse.
- "...learn more about how teens interact with each other in this social media era, and how those behaviors affect substance use rates," affirms Volkow.

"It is encouraging to see more young people making healthy choices not to use illicit substances," concludes Botticelli. "We must continue to do all we can to support young people through evidence-based prevention efforts as well as treatment for those who may develop substance use disorders. And now that Congress has acted on the President's request to provide \$1 billion in new funding for prevention and treatment, we will have significant new resources to do this."

[Learn more about the 2016 MTF](#). You can also obtain a quick overview of this year's *MTF* findings by viewing the 2016 [MTF NIDA Survey Highlights – Interview with Dr. Nora Volkow, NIDA Director](#)