

Teen Drug Use High Despite Decline in Smoking

BY HEIDI SPLETE
Senior Writer

WASHINGTON — Drug abuse among U.S. adolescents remained steady in 2008, compared with recent years, but cigarette smoking is at a historic low, according to the 2008 Monitoring the Future survey, released by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Students in grades 8, 10, and 12 continue to show a gradual decline in their use of certain drugs, specifically amphetamines, methamphetamine, crystal methamphetamine, cocaine, and crack, according to the latest survey. But the results, which were announced at a press conference, are “very, very fragile,” said John Walters, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. “We still have more work to do.” Contributing to the decline in use are efforts by the federal government to reduce drug availability.



Physicians must be vigilant about screening for drug use and providing interventions that can improve teens' health.

DR. VOLKOW

The survey, entitled “Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use” (MTF), has been conducted annually among 12th-grade students in the United States since 1975, and among 8th and 10th graders since 1991. It includes data from classroom surveys, and this year included data from 46,348 students in 386 public and private schools in the continental United States.

Overall, 14.6% of teens reported using illicit drugs in the previous month, representing a 25% decrease in use from 2001, which is statistically significant. In addition, 15.4% of 12th graders reported abusing prescription drugs during 2008, with 9.7% of this student group reporting nonmedical use of the prescription painkiller Vicodin, and 4.7% reporting abuse of OxyContin. These rates are essentially unchanged from 2007.

In addition, marijuana use plateaued: 10.9%, 23.9%, and 32.4% of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders respectively reported using marijuana in the past year, basically mirroring 2007 findings. However, fewer eighth graders said they thought inhalants or smoking marijuana was harmful or said that they disapproved of their use, compared with responses from the previous year's survey.

Notable data on older teens' attitudes about drugs included a continuing downward trend in the numbers of 12th graders who think LSD use is harmful.

Cigarette smoking rates continued to show a steady decline for all grades. The percentage of teens reporting cigarette use was 12.6% in 2008 (20.2% in 2001). But smoking remains a significant threat to adolescent health. More than 1 in 10 of 12th-grade participant reported daily cig-

arette smoking, and 5.4% reported smoking half a pack of cigarettes daily.

Alcohol use continued to decline at all three grade levels. Yet, underage drinking remains a problem, especially among older teens. Nearly 25% of 12th graders reported having five or more consecutive drinks at least once during the 2 weeks prior to taking the survey.

“Drug addiction is a disease of the brain,” said Dr. Nora Volkow, director of

the National Institute on Drug Abuse. She said physicians should be vigilant about screening teenagers and providing intervention that can improve their health.

Presenters at the press conference said those who deal in adolescent health cannot afford to become complacent; they must continue to put out the message about the dangers and consequences of smoking, alcohol, and drug use.

The MTF survey is conducted by re-

searchers at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and funded by a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, part of the National Institutes of Health and the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The full report is at www.monitoringthefuture.org. ■

To view a video interview of investigators discussing the survey results, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfL1ZUf5gI>

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