

Alcohol and Drug Use

The following report is based on a portion of self-reported data from the 2002 Hamilton County Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), conducted among 2,752 Hamilton County students in grades 9 through 12. A total of 19 schools, including 16 public and 3 private schools, participated in the survey. The questionnaire was designed by the Centers for Disease Control with eight questions generated by the Chattanooga Hamilton County Regional Health Council. The questionnaire included 96 questions addressing behaviors concerning personal safety, violence, depression and suicidal thoughts, tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, sexual behaviors, diet, and exercise. Within the analysis, all discussions of differences between respondent groups are based on differences which are statistically significant.

The survey was administered in the classroom and relies on anonymous, self-reported responses.

Executive Summary

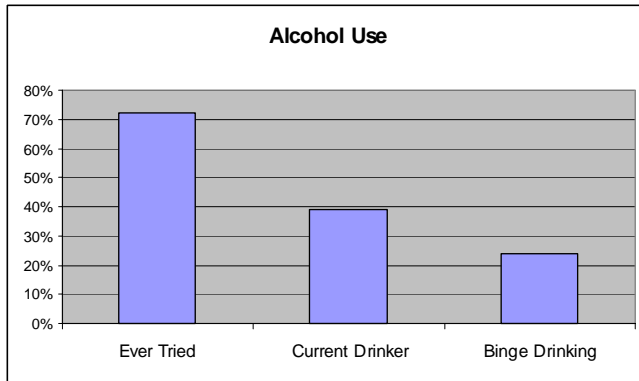
- ▼ Alcohol use is widespread among students surveyed. Seventy-two percent of student respondents have had at least one drink of alcohol (ever tried). Thirty-nine percent were current drinkers, defined as having a drink within the past month. Twenty-four percent have engaged in binge drinking, defined as having five or more drinks within a couple of hours, in the past month.
- ▼ Although some groups of students were significantly more likely to drink alcohol than others, at least a third of students in each demographic group studied (sex, grade, race, living situation, and school performance) drank alcohol once a month or more often.
- ▼ Alcohol use increased with grade level, from 32% in 9th grade to 47% in 12th grade. Similar increases in use by grade were not found for the other substances in the survey.
- ▼ Twenty-three percent of students have smoked marijuana in the past 30 days, and are defined as current users. Forty percent have ever tried marijuana.
- ▼ Fewer students reported using drugs other than marijuana. Thirteen percent have used inhalants -- 5% within the past month. Eleven percent has used Methamphetamine, and 10% have used ecstasy. Nine percent have used cocaine -- 5% in the past month. Since the actual numbers of students using these substances are small, breaking them into smaller groups for comparison yielded few significant differences. Where found, significant differences are noted within the points below.
- ▼ School performance was the factor most consistently associated with substance use. Poorer performing students (primarily C's, D's, or F's) were significantly more likely than were better performing students (mostly A's or B's) to use every substance included in the survey.
- ▼ In general, substance use was more prevalent among males than among females. Alcohol was the exception; both sexes were equally likely to drink. However, male students had their first drink at a younger age than female students.
- ▼ White students were more likely than black students to use alcohol, inhalants, methamphetamine, and cocaine. Both groups were equally likely to use marijuana and other substances.

- ▼ Alcohol and marijuana use were associated with living situation. Fewer students from two-parent homes used alcohol or marijuana than students from either single-parent or parent/stepparent homes.
- ▼ Alcohol and marijuana use starts young – often before age 13. Thirty-six percent of current drinkers and 26% of marijuana users had their first experience before age 13. The peak age for trying both was between 13 and 14.
- ▼ Twenty-seven percent of students reported episodes of depression within the past year. Substance use among those students was significantly higher than among those who had not been depressed.
- ▼ A student's body image may be an important factor in identifying at-risk students. Students rating themselves as either very underweight or very overweight were more likely than students less dissatisfied with their weight to use several substances addressed in the survey.
- ▼ Alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use was associated with using other substances. That is, a student who used alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana (so called “gateway drugs”) was likely to also use all the other substances included in the survey.
- ▼ Twelve percent of students surveyed reported they used alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana. About half did not use any of the three.

I. Alcohol Use

A. General

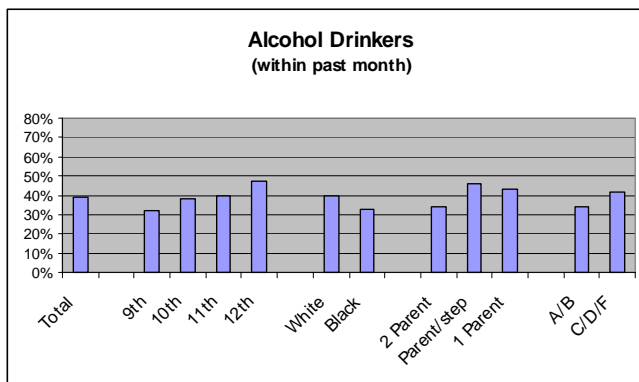
Alcohol use is widespread among youth in Hamilton County. Seventy-two percent of students surveyed have ever tried alcohol other than a few sips. Thirty-nine percent have had a drink within the past month and are considered current drinkers. Twenty-four percent have engaged in binge drinking, defined as having five or more drinks within a couple of hours.



B. Current Drinkers

Thirty-nine percent of students surveyed drink alcohol. Although some groups of students are significantly more likely to drink alcohol than others, at least a third of students in each demographic group studied are current drinkers. Males and females are equally likely to drink. Drinking in the past thirty days is more common among:

- ▼ White students than Black students (40% vs. 33%)
- ▼ 12th grade students, and decreases with grade level (12th – 47%; 11th – 40%; 10th – 38%; 9th – 32%)
- ▼ Students from parent/stepparent and single-parent families than students from two-parent families (46% and 43% vs. 34%)
- ▼ Poorer performing students (mostly A's or B's) than better performing students (mostly C's, D's, or F's) (42% vs. 34%)



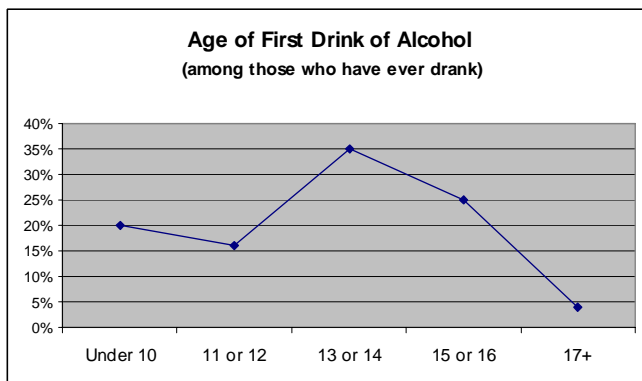
C. Binge Drinking

One in four students reported they had engaged in binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks in a row, within the past month. Black students were significantly less likely to engage in binge drinking than any other group. In all other demographic groups studied, at least one in five students engaged in this behavior. Reported binge drinking is higher among:

- ▼ White students than black students (26% vs. 13%)
- ▼ Male students than female students (27% vs. 20%)
- ▼ 12th grade students, and declines with grade in school (31% 12th grade; 27% 11th grade; 20% 10th grade; 19% 9th grade)
- ▼ Poorer performing students than better performing students (32% vs. 19%)
- ▼ Students from parent/stepparent and single-parent families than students from two-parent families (28% and 26% vs. 20%)

D. Age of First Drink

Among students who have ever drunk alcohol, 36% had their first drink before the age of 13. The peak ages for trying alcohol were between 13 and 14.



The percentage of students ever having a drink of alcohol who had their first drink before age 13 is higher among:

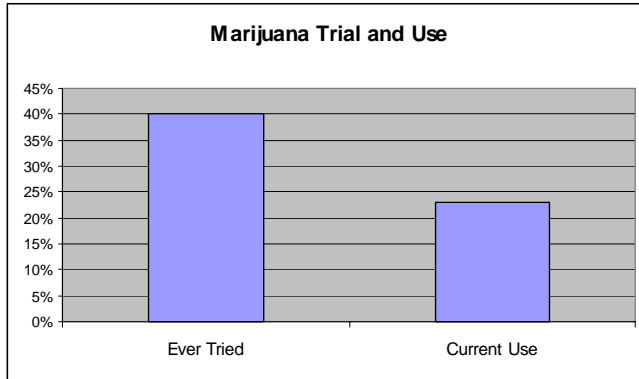
- ▼ Males than females (43% vs. 31%)
- ▼ Black students than white students (45% vs. 34%)
- ▼ Poorer performing students than better performing students (43% vs. 32%)
- ▼ Students from single-parent and parent stepparent homes than two-parent homes (42% and 39% vs. 32%)

Note that, although males and females are equally likely to drink, males start drinking at a younger age than females. Further, a larger percentage of white students than of black students drink, but the black students who drink were more likely to have started before age 13 than were the white students.

II. Marijuana Use

A. General

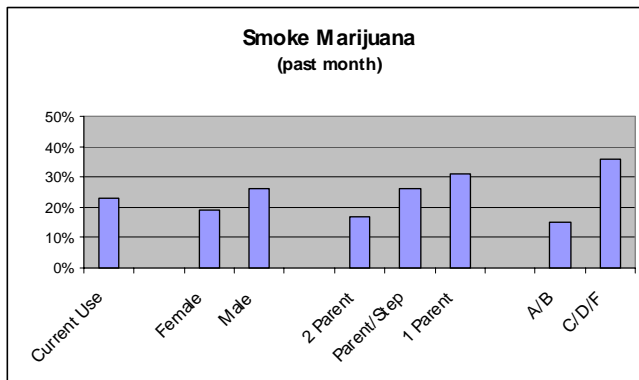
Overall, 40% of students have tried marijuana. Twenty-three percent of students have smoked marijuana within the past month and are considered current users.



B. Current Users

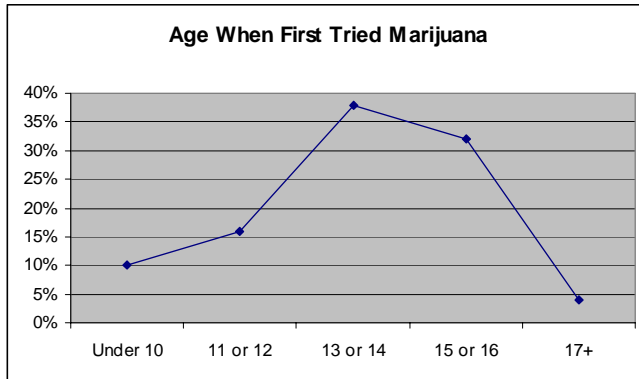
Almost one in four students surveyed smoke marijuana. There was no significant difference in the percentage of marijuana smokers by grade level. Black and white students were equally likely to smoke marijuana. Sex, living situation, and school performance were associated with marijuana use. Marijuana use was more prevalent among:

- ▼ Poorer performing students than better performing students (36% vs. 15%)
- ▼ Students from single-parent and parent/stepparent families (31% and 26% vs. 17%)
- ▼ Males than females (26% vs. 19%)



C. Age of First Trial

Over one in four students who had ever used marijuana was less than thirteen years old when they tried the first time. Male students (30%) were more likely than female students (21%) to try marijuana before age thirteen. However, the peak ages for trying marijuana were between 13 and 14.



III. Other Drug Use

A. Inhalants

Overall, 13% of students reported they had ever used inhalants, and 5% had used them in the past month. Significantly more white students (15%) than black students (8%) had ever used inhalants.

B. Methamphetamine

Overall, 11% of students have ever used Methamphetamine (also called speed, crystal meth, crank, or ice). Gender, race, and school performance are associated with methamphetamine use. Methamphetamine use was higher among:

- ▼ Poorer performing students than better performing students (16% vs. 8%)
- ▼ White students than black student (12% vs. 5%)
- ▼ Male students than female students (12% vs. 9%)

C. Ecstasy

Ten percent of students have used ecstasy in their lifetime. Poorer performing students (15%) were more likely to have tried ecstasy than better performing students (7%).

D. Cocaine

Nine percent of students had used any form of cocaine, including powder, crack, or freebase in their lifetime (lifetime cocaine use). Five percent had used cocaine in the past month. Lifetime cocaine use was associated with gender, race, and school performance. Lifetime cocaine use was higher among:

- ▼ Poorer performing students than better performing students (13% vs. 6%)
- ▼ Males than females (11% vs. 6%)
- ▼ White students than black students (10% vs. 3%)

E. Steroids

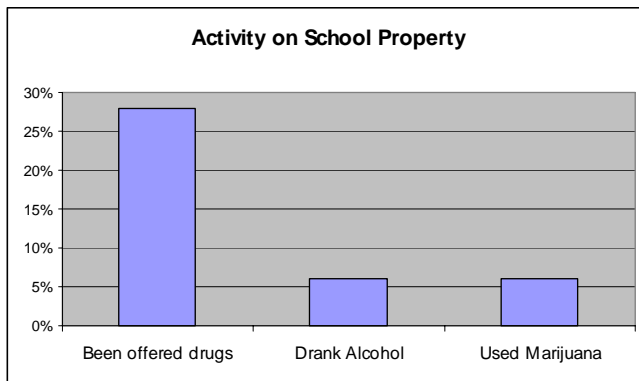
Seven percent of students reported they had ever taken steroid pills or shots with out a doctor's prescription.

F. Injected Drug and Heroin

Five percent of students reported they had ever used heroin, and 4% reported they had injected an illegal drug.

IV. School Property

Over one in four students had been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property within the past year. Six percent of students had consumed alcohol and 6% had smoked marijuana on school property within the past month.



V. Substance Use and Other Factors

A. Depression

A question included in another section of the survey determined the prevalence of depression among students. In the question, students were asked if, within the past year, did they "ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row" that they stopped doing some usual activities. Some 27% of students responded that they had experienced such feelings. These same students were significantly more likely than students who were not depressed to report substance use.

B. Body Image

In another part of the survey, students were asked whether they considered themselves very underweight, slightly underweight, about the right weight, slightly overweight, or very overweight. Students who rated themselves as very underweight or very overweight tended to also report using several of the substances included in the survey more often than other students. Interestingly, there were no differences in substance use according to a student's actual weight as reported in the survey. This suggests that body image may be an important factor in identifying at-risk students.

VI. Gateway Drugs

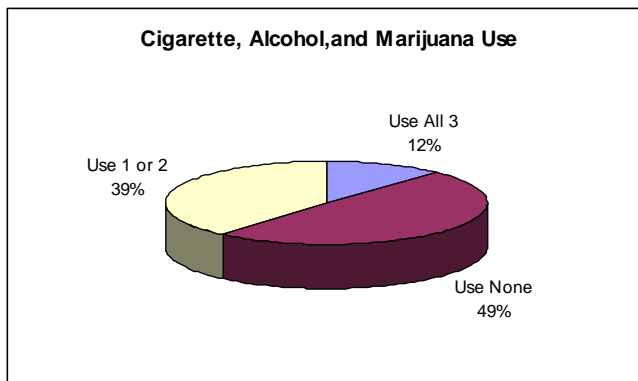
A. Alcohol, Marijuana, and Other Drug Use

Cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana are often referred to as gateway drugs. That is, once someone has used cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana, they may be more likely to go on to use other drugs. While the data do not indicate which substances were first used, students who use the gateway drugs are significantly more likely to also use other substances as illustrated below.

	Cigarettes		Alcohol		Marijuana	
	Smoke	Don't Smoke	Drink	Don't Drink	Use	Don't Use
Marijuana (past mo.)	58%	40%	48%	7%	100%	0%
Alcohol (past mo.)	76%	25%	100%	0%	81%	26%
Inhalants (past mo.)	27%	8%	23%	7%	29%	8%
Methamphetamine (ever)	30%	3%	22%	3%	33%	3%
Ecstasy (ever)	28%	3%	21%	3%	33%	2%
Cocaine (ever)	26%	2%	19%	2%	33%	3%

B. Use of Multiple Gateway Drugs

Twelve percent of students in the survey indicated they currently smoked cigarettes, drank alcohol, and used marijuana. Half of students did not use either of the three. If a student uses all three substances, the probability of also using cocaine (59%), Methamphetamine (55%), ecstasy (40%), or inhalants (35%) increases dramatically. Use of these harder drugs is almost non-existent among students who don't smoke, drink, or use marijuana. The exception is that 5% of students who don't smoke, drink, or use marijuana have tried huffing. (Huffing drugs are legal substances that are readily accessible.)



In comparing students who use tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana to students who don't use any of these, the most striking difference is school performance. The majority of students using all three substances are poor performing students, making primarily C's, D's, and F's, while students using none of these substances tend to make mostly A's and B's. Students using all three substances are less likely to come from two-parent homes than students using none of them. White students make up a disproportionate share of the students using all three substances. Students using all three substances tend to be equally distributed by grade in school. However, the distribution of students who use none of the substances tends to decrease with grade level. This implies that, while they may not be using tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana, they tend to use at least one of the substances as they move from 9th to 12th grade.

Students Using Cigarettes, Alcohol, and Marijuana Compared to Students Who Use None of These		
	Use All Three (12% of total)	Use None of These (49% of total)
School Performance		
Primarily A/B	38%	71%
Primarily C/D/F	62%	29%
Living Situation		
Two Parent	45%	64%
Parent/Stepparent	20%	14%
Single Parent	17%	13%
Race		
White	78%	71%
Black	13%	23%
Other	9%	6%
Grade		
9th	23%	31%
10th	27%	30%
11th	25%	23%
12th	24%	17%
Gender		
Female	43%	71%
Male	57%	29%