

RESULTS FROM THE 2003 MONITORING THE FUTURE STUDY

EXCEEDING THE PRESIDENT'S GOALS FOR REDUCING YOUTH DRUG USE: 2001 – 2003

- ☑ The *National Drug Control Strategy* articulates the President's two- and five-year goals of reducing youth illicit drug use by 10 and 25 percent, respectively. The nation has exceeded the first goal with an 11 percent reduction in past month use of any illicit drug by youth between 2001 and 2003, according to data from the Monitoring the Future (MTF) study, an annual survey of the nation's 8th, 10th, and 12th graders. This is the first decline in youth drug use of such a magnitude in more than a decade. The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, the only Federal drug prevention program using mass media to target youth's attitudes, beliefs, and intentions toward drugs, undoubtedly has played a major role in bringing about these historic results.
- ☑ At the request of ONDCP, MTF researchers conducted special analyses for all three grades combined of the two-year changes (2001 to 2003) in youth use of illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco; changes in anti-drug attitudes; and the impact of anti-drug advertising (typically, MTF focuses on the changes from the prior year among the individual grades). Highlights from the 2003 MTF include (all changes discussed here are statistically significant):

Substance Use

- **Any illicit drug:** Use of any illicit drug in the past 30 days (current use) among students declined 11 percent, from 19.4 percent to 17.3 percent. Similar declines were seen for past year use (11%, from 31.8 % to 28.3 %) and lifetime use (9 %, from 41.0 % to 37.4 %).
 - As a result of these dramatic declines, approximately 400,000 fewer youth in 2003 are using illicit drugs than in 2001.
- **Marijuana:** Use of marijuana, the most commonly used illicit drug among youth and the drug of primary interest to the Media Campaign, also declined significantly. Current use declined 11 percent, from 16.6 percent to 14.8 percent; past year use also declined 11 percent, from 27.5 percent to 24.5 percent; and lifetime use declined 8.2 percent, from 35.3 to 32.4 percent.
- **Ecstasy and LSD:** The use of the hallucinogens LSD and ecstasy among youth has plummeted. Lifetime use of LSD fell 43 percent (from 6.6% to 3.7%) and past year and current use each dropped by nearly two-thirds (from 4.1% to 1.6% and 1.5% to 0.6%, respectively). Lifetime use of ecstasy dropped 32 percent, from 8.0 percent to 5.5 percent. Past year and current use were each cut in half (from 6.1% to 3.1 percent and 2.4% to 1.1%).
 - The declines in LSD use appear to be the result of successful law enforcement activities since perceived availability has dropped sharply in recent years following a major disruption of the U.S. supply, while the declines in ecstasy use appear to be the result of successful prevention efforts, since the perceptions of harmfulness of using this drug have increased over the past two years.
- **Cocaine and Heroin:** Use of these two drugs among teens is relatively uncommon. Rates of use in 2003 are unchanged from 2001, but are below their peak levels of the late 1990s.
- **Inhalants:** Lifetime and past year use of inhalants declined 12 and 11 percent, respectively (from 15.3% to 13.4% and 7.0% to 6.2%). However, past year use of inhalants among 8th graders was up 14 percent (from 7.7% to 8.7%) between 2002 and 2003—the only increase of any substance reported by MTF in 2003 over 2002.

- **Amphetamines:** Use of amphetamines, traditionally the second most commonly used illicit drug among youth, also dropped over the past two years. Lifetime use declined 15 percent, from 13.9 percent to 11.8 percent. Past year and current use each fell 17 percent (from 9.6% to 8.0% and 4.7% to 3.9%, respectively).
- **Alcohol:** The use of alcohol, the most commonly used substance among youth, also declined. Past year and current use each declined 7 percent (from 58.4% to 54.6% and 35.7% to 33.3%, respectively). Perhaps more importantly, reports of having been drunk declined by 11 percent in each of the three prevalence categories.
- **Cigarettes:** Cigarette smoking among youth continues to decline. Lifetime use dropped 17 percent, from 49.1 percent to 40.9 percent. Current use fell 18 percent, from 20.3 percent to 16.6 percent.

Anti-Drug Attitudes

- A key aim of the Media Campaign is to improve youth perceptions of the harm of using marijuana. We have seen improvements in all three grades for this outcome. Among 8th graders, the perceptions of the harmfulness of trying marijuana once or twice, using it occasionally, and smoking it regularly all improved, by 7 percent, 6 percent, and 3 percent, respectively. Among 10th graders, the perceived risk of smoking marijuana occasionally or regularly improved 9 percent and 5 percent, respectively. Among 12th graders, the perceived risk of smoking marijuana occasionally increased 15 percent.

Impact of Anti-Drug Advertising

- Exposure to anti-drug advertising (of which, the Media Campaign is the major contributor) has had an impact on improving youth anti-drug attitudes and intentions. Youth in all three grades say that such ads have made their attitudes to a “great extent” or “very great extent” less favorable toward drugs and made them less likely to use drugs in the future over the course of the Media Campaign (i.e., since 1998). However, more than half of the increase in these outcomes among all three grades has occurred in the past two years. This is particularly striking among 10th graders, the primary target audience of the Media Campaign.