



National Institute on Drug Abuse
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EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE
Thursday, December 11, 2008
1:00 p.m. (EST)

NIDA Contacts: Dorie Hightower or
Stephanie Older
301-443-6245
media@nida.nih.gov

Downward Trend in Teen Marijuana Use Slows; Prescription Drug Abuse Remains High

NIDA's 2008 Monitoring the Future Survey Shows Mixed Results

WASHINGTON -- There are signs that the ongoing decline in teen marijuana use in recent years has stalled; however the downward trend in cigarette and alcohol use continues, according to the 2008 Monitoring the Future (MTF) Survey. Results were announced today at a news conference.

The MTF survey indicates that marijuana use among eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders, which has shown a consistent decline since the mid-1990s, appears to have leveled off with 10.9 percent of eighth graders, 23.9 percent of tenth graders, and 32.4 percent of twelfth graders reporting past year use. Heightening the concern over this stabilization in use is the finding that, compared to last year, the proportion of eighth graders who perceived smoking marijuana as harmful and the proportion disapproving of its use have decreased.

The Monitoring the Future survey - now in its 33rd year - is a series of classroom surveys of eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan under a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

“The 2008 survey results reinforce the fact that we cannot become complacent in our efforts to persuade teens not to smoke, drink or abuse illicit substances,” said HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt. “As long as young people are being exposed to images that make taking drugs seem glamorous, we need to counter them with truthful messages about the risks and consequences of drug abuse.”

“The Monitoring the Future Survey is a powerful tool that allows us to monitor emerging and long-term trends in drug use,” said NIDA Director Nora D. Volkow, M.D. “And while the long term general decline is encouraging, especially for cigarettes and alcohol, some of the other findings this year amplify our concerns for potential problems in the future—especially the non-medical use of prescription drugs.”

The 2008 MTF survey indicates a continuing high rate of prescription drug abuse among teens, with little change seen in the past six years. Nearly 10 percent of seniors reported past year nonmedical use of Vicodin, and 4.7 percent report abusing Oxycontin, both powerful opioid painkillers. In fact, seven of the top 10 drugs abused by twelfth graders in the year prior to the survey were prescribed or purchased over-the-counter.

There are some bright spots in the survey—among them, that cigarette smoking is at the lowest rate in the history of the MTF survey. And there continues to be a gradual decline in alcohol use in all grades, with a significant decline from 2007 to 2008 among tenth graders on all measures of use (lifetime, past year, past month, daily, and binge drinking). Nevertheless, given the devastating related health costs, tobacco and alcohol use by teens still remain at high levels. More than one in ten high school seniors say they smoke daily; 5.4 percent smoke more than a half pack a day. While drinking continues a slow downward trend, close to 25 percent of seniors report having five or more drinks in a row sometime in the two weeks prior to the survey.

The MTF Survey also measures teen attitudes about drugs, including perceived harmfulness, perceived availability, and disapproval, which are often seen as harbingers of change in abuse rates. Of particular concern is the several-year decline among twelfth graders who perceive use of LSD as harmful. Similarly, the proportion of eighth graders who perceive inhalants as harmful has declined, as has their disapproval of inhalant abuse.

Overall, 46,348 students from 386 public and private schools in the eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades participated in this year's survey. Since 1975, the MTF survey has measured drug, alcohol, and cigarette use and related attitudes in twelfth graders nationwide; eighth and tenth graders were added to the survey in 1991. Survey participants report their drug use behaviors across three time periods: lifetime, past year, and past month. The survey has been conducted since its inception by investigators at the University of Michigan. Additional information on the Monitoring the Future Survey, as well as comments from Dr. Volkow can be found at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/Drugpages/MTF.html>

MTF is one of three major HHS-sponsored surveys that provide data on substance use among youth, along with the National Survey on Drug Use and Health and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The MTF Web site is <http://monitoringthefuture.org>. More information on MTF can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>; or <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, sponsored by HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is the primary source of statistical information on substance use in the U.S. population 12 years of age and older. The survey collects data in household interviews, using computer-assisted self-administration. More information is available at <http://www.drugabusestatistics.samhsa.gov>.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey, part of HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, is a school-based survey that collects data from students in grades 9-12. The survey includes questions on a wide variety of health-related risk behaviors, including substance abuse. More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm>.

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