

How significant is teen drug use?

Drug use among teenagers in the United States is a serious concern. In 2003 more than 7.5 million individuals aged 12 to 17 reported having used an illicit drug at least once in their lifetime. In the same year students in grades nine through twelve indicated that 40.2 percent of respondents had used marijuana, 12.1 percent had used inhalants, 11.1 percent had used MDMA (also known as ecstasy), 8.7 percent had used cocaine, 7.6 percent had used methamphetamine, 6.1 percent had illegally used steroids, 3.3 percent had used heroin, and 3.2 percent had injected an illegal drug one or more times during their lifetime.

Furthermore, 9.9 percent of student respondents nationwide tried marijuana for the first time before the age of 13, 28.7 percent had been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property during the year preceding the survey, and 5.8 percent had used marijuana on school property one or more times during the 30 days preceding the survey.

What is the correlation between age of first drug use and dependence?

Adults who first used drugs at a younger age were more likely to be classified with illicit drug dependence or abuse than adults who initiated use at an older age.

For example, among adults aged 18 or older who first tried marijuana at

age 14 or younger, 13.0 percent were classified with illicit drug dependence or abuse compared with only 2.8 percent of adults who had first used marijuana at age 18 or older.

Teens who first used marijuana before age 17 were shown to have smaller brains and to be physically smaller in height and weight than teens who first used marijuana after age 17. Exposure to marijuana and other drugs at certain critical periods, such as early adolescence, may alter normal patterns of development.

What are some of the risks specific to marijuana use?

Marijuana use, which is prevalent among youth, has been shown to interfere with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Motivation and psychosexual/emotional development also may be affected.

Early adolescent marijuana use increases the risk in late adolescence of not graduating from high school, delinquency, having multiple sexual partners, and not always using condoms. Such marijuana use can result in perceiving drugs as not harmful, having long-term problems with cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana, and having friends who exhibit deviant behavior.

In addition, early adolescent marijuana use is related to later adolescent problems that limit the acquisition of skills necessary for employment and heighten the risks of contracting HIV and abusing legal and illegal substances.

What are some risks associated with the use of other illicit drugs?

Any illicit drug use by adolescents can have immediate and long-term health and social consequences. Overall, mental health problems including depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, suicide, and other psychosocial dysfunctions are frequently linked to substance abuse among adolescents. Drug abuse has been shown to increase the likelihood of psychiatric disorders.

Abuse of specific drugs exposes users to a range of serious consequences. Cocaine use is linked with health problems including eating disorders, disabilities, and death from heart attacks and strokes. Hallucinogens can affect brain chemistry and result in problems with learning new information and memory. Methamphetamine can cause rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, and damage to the small blood vessels in the brain that can lead to stroke. Heroin use can result in slow and shallow breathing, convulsions, coma, and even death.

Young people who inject drugs expose themselves to additional risks, including contracting HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne viruses. Chronic injection drug users also risk scarred or collapsed veins, infection of

the heart lining and valves, abscesses, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and liver and kidney disease.

Substance abuse among youth has also been strongly linked to delinquency. Arrest, adjudication, and intervention by the juvenile justice system are eventual consequences for many youths engaged in alcohol and other drug use.

What are some common signs of teen drug abuse?

Sudden and extreme changes in personality, physical appearance, social activity, or school performance may signal teen drug use. Personality changes may include becoming disrespectful and verbally or physically abusive, extreme mood swings, paranoia, confusion, anger, depression, and secretive behavior. Teens who abuse drugs may lie about what they are doing and where they are going. They may also steal, claim to lose possessions they once valued, have a lot of money, ask for money, and withdraw from family and family activities. With regard to physical effects, teens using drugs may exhibit a lack of hygiene and grooming, weight loss or gain, hyperactivity or lethargy, and insomnia or excessive sleeping. These teens may also drop old friends and activities, skip school, lose interest in school, receive low grades, sleep in class, lose concentration, and have trouble with memory.

Other products of interest:

- *Huffing—The Abuse of Inhalants*
- *Prescription Drug Abuse and Youth*
- *Drugs, Youth, and the Internet*

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