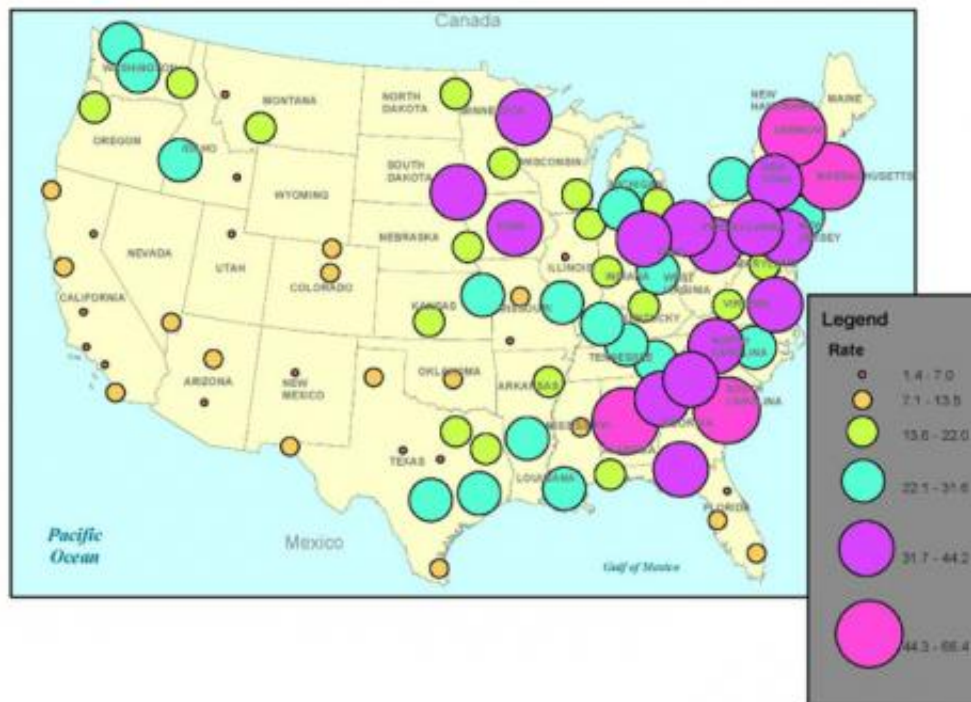


# Twitter analysis: Adderall abuse as finals study aid 'trending' on East Coast

May 1 2013



This map shows the rate of Adderall tweets per 100,000 students by 150-mile college clusters in the United States. Credit: Courtesy of the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*

A growing number of college students are abusing the ADHD medication Adderall to give them an academic edge, and they're

tweeting about it.

Thanks to [Twitter](#), tracking roughly when and where Adderall use happens is now possible. So a group of BYU [health science](#) and computer science researchers did just that.

Their six-month study, appearing in the current issue of the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, produced two major revelations about Adderall:

1. It is mentioned most heavily among students in the northeast and south regions of the U.S.
2. Tweets about Adderall peak sharply during final exam periods.

"Adderall is the most commonly abused prescription stimulant among college students," said lead researcher Carl Hanson, a professor of health science at BYU. "Our concern is that the more it becomes a social norm in online conversation, the higher risk there is of more people abusing it."

For the study, researchers monitored all public-facing Twitter mentions of "Adderall" between November 2011 and May 2012, but removed tweets from users whose screen-names indicated they were promoting Adderall.

The results showed 213,633 tweets from 132,099 unique users mentioned the drug during the study, with an average of 930 per day. Though the analysis didn't sort out "legal" vs. "illegal," use, Adderall tweets spiked sharply during traditional finals periods, with peaks on Dec. 13 (2,813) and April 30 (2,207).

Researchers also found that Adderall tweets peaked during the middle of the week and declined by the weekend. Both findings are consistent with

previous research that shows [college students](#) who abuse ADHD stimulants do so primarily during times of academic stress.

"It's not like they're using it as a party drug on the weekend," Hanson said. "This data suggests that they're using it as a study aid. Many of the tweets even made a study reference."

The rate of Adderall tweets was highest among college and university clusters in the northeast and south regions of the United States. Researchers surmise that the high activity in those areas could be connected to the fraternity/sorority system, which has deep roots in the northeast.

Vermont had the highest per capita Adderall tweet rate, followed by Massachusetts and Alabama, while Southeast Texas had the lowest, followed by Central Illinois and Northern California.

The Northern Utah college cluster was one of the lowest Adderall-tweeting areas, as were a number of western areas such as Phoenix, Los Angeles and Reno.

The Twitter analysis also revealed that 9 percent of Adderall tweets mentioned another substance, with the most common two being alcohol (4.8 percent) and [stimulants](#) like coffee or Red Bull (4.7 percent). Other substances included cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamines and depressants such as Xanax.

"[Tweets](#) hinting at co-ingestion are particularly troubling because morbidity and mortality risk increases when substances are combined," said study co-author Michael Barnes.

Researchers hope the study renews interest in promoting the safe and legal use of Adderall and other substances on college campuses.

Additionally, authors hope to spark more promotion of student wellbeing and study habits to better manage the academic demands and pressures of college.

Provided by Brigham Young University

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