

Hispanic teens more likely to abuse drugs, survey finds

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Concern is that behavior is increasingly considered 'normal,' expert says.

(HealthDay)—Hispanic teens are more likely to abuse illegal and legal drugs than their black or white peers, a new report finds.

Fifty-four percent of Hispanic [teens](#) surveyed said they had used an [illicit drug](#), compared with 45 percent of black teens and 43 percent of white teens.

"Hispanic kids in grades nine to 12 are at higher risk," said Sean Clarkin, director of strategy and programs at The Partnership at Drugfree.org, the [nonprofit group](#) that released the report Tuesday.

Hispanic children perceive these drugs as less harmful than other teens,

he said.

Why is that? "They see drug use among their peers and in their community, and the messages they are not getting from their parents—these all may be contributing to this feeling that drug use is normal," Clarkin said.

The survey found that 62 percent of Hispanic teens have been offered drugs—including Ecstasy, crack/cocaine, [heroin](#) and [methamphetamine](#)—at least once, compared with 53 percent of white teens and 46 percent of black teens.

And schools are not drug-free zones, the report suggested. Forty-two percent of Hispanic teens have been offered drugs at school, compared with 30 percent of white teens and 28 percent of black teens.

Conducted yearly, the latest survey included responses from nearly 3,900 teens and more than 800 parents questioned in 2012.

In many cases, when it comes to teen drug use, parents aren't communicating disapproval, especially when it comes to marijuana, Clarkin noted.

According to the report, 21 percent of Hispanic parents "think it's OK if their teen smokes marijuana sometimes," compared with 11 percent of black parents and 6 percent of white parents.

In addition, 28 percent of Hispanic parents say using [prescription drugs](#) is safer than using [street drugs](#), compared with 20 percent of black parents and 9 percent of white parents.

"Many parents feel there is nothing they can do; it's really the responsibility of the school. And parents are at a loss for what to say or

what to do," Clarkin said.

"Parents, however, underestimate the influence and leverage that they have with their kids," he said. "The attitude of parents is often 'that's what kids do, I did it and I'm fine, so don't worry,' but the reality is the sooner action is taken, the lower the chance that this is going to develop into something problematic."

On the plus side, the report found that 85 percent of Hispanic parents know that teens who start using drugs and alcohol are more likely to have substance abuse problems later on. This awareness was seen in 74 percent of white parents and 73 percent of black parents.

Moreover, 94 percent of Hispanic parents say they are likely to take action when they find out their child uses drugs or alcohol at home. That compares with 93 percent of black parents and 86 percent of white [parents](#), according to the report.

"It's all about parental guidance," said Dr. Metee Comkornruecha, at the department of adolescent medicine at Miami Children's Hospital. "It's about educating kids and changing views on drugs—not seeing them as harmless, but as potentially causing abuse."

Highlights of the report include:

- 47 percent of Hispanic teens used [marijuana](#), compared with 39 percent of black teens and 36 percent of white teens.
- 13 percent of Hispanic teens used Ecstasy, compared with 8 percent of black teens and 6 percent of white teens.
- 13 percent of Hispanic teens used cocaine, compared with 8 percent of black teens and 3 percent of white teens.
- 62 percent of Hispanic teens drank alcohol, compared with 59 percent of white teens and 50 percent of black teens.

- 24 percent of Hispanic teens say they see frequent drug use in their communities, compared with 15 percent of white teens and 24 percent of black teens.
- 26 percent of Hispanic teens have abused or misused a prescription [drug](#), compared with 15 percent for white or black teens.
- 16 percent of Hispanic teens have mixed alcohol with abusing prescription drugs, compared with 11 percent of white teens and 6 percent of black teens.
- 10 percent of Hispanic teens abused over-the-counter cough medicine in the past year, compared with 5 percent for both white and black teens.

More information: To learn more about teen drug abuse, visit the [U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse](#).

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