

# Young Americans' prescription med abuse still down: report

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2012 national survey also found teens' drinking, tobacco use dropped over decade.

(HealthDay)— The rate of illegal use of prescription drugs by young American adults is lower than it was a few years ago, as are drinking rates among kids, a new federal government report reveals.

"These findings show that while we have made progress in preventing some aspects of substance abuse we must redouble our efforts to reduce and eliminate all forms of it throughout our nation," Pamela Hyde, administrator of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), said in an agency news release.

The percentage of 18- to 25-year-olds who reported illegal use of [prescription drugs](#) within the past month was 5.3 percent in 2012. That rate is similar to rates in 2011 and 2010, but much lower than the rate of 6.4 percent in 2009, according to the report.

SAMHSA's 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health also found that the rates of past month drinking, [binge drinking](#) and heavy drinking among youth aged 12 to 17 were lower than in 2002 and 2009.

The report, released in time for National Recovery Month, indicated that the percentage of people 12 and older who drove under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past year was 11.2 percent in 2012, compared with 14.2 percent in 2002 and 11.1 percent in 2011.

And the overall rate of [illicit drug use](#) among Americans 12 and older was similar in 2011 and 2012, at about 9 percent (or nearly 24 million people), the findings showed.

When it comes to illicit drugs, [marijuana](#) remains the most widely used, with 7.3 percent of Americans using pot in 2012. This was an increase over the rate of 5.8 percent in 2007. Marijuana use rose in nearly every age group between 2007 and 2012, but did fall from 7.9 percent in 2011 to 7.2 percent in 2012 among those aged 12 to 17.

There was also a significant rise in heroin use. The number of people 12 and older who used heroin over the past year rose from 373,000 in 2007 to 669,000 in 2012, the investigators found.

The researchers pointed out in a SAMHSA news release that there is good news in their report. Tobacco use among those under 18 years of age fell from 15.2 percent in 2002 to 8.6 percent in 2012, and the percentage of people in the 12-to-17 age group with substance dependence or abuse dropped from nearly 9 percent to about 6 percent over the same period.

However, the report also found that many Americans who need treatment for a substance use disorder still don't receive specialty treatment. The results showed that while an estimated 23 million

Americans 12 or older needed treatment for abuse of [illicit drugs](#) or alcohol in 2012, only 2.5 million (about 11 percent) of those people received it in a specialized treatment setting.

"These statistics represent real people, families and communities dealing with the devastating consequences of abuse and addiction. We must strive to prevent further abuse and provide the hope of treatment and recovery to all people needing help," Hyde noted.

Gil Kerlikowske, the director of National Drug Control Policy, stressed that "reducing the impact of drug use and its consequences on our nation requires a robust public health response coupled with smart-on-crime strategies that protect public safety."

And, Kerlikowske added in the news release, "for the first time in a decade, we are seeing real, and significant reductions in the [abuse](#) of prescription drugs in America, proving that a more comprehensive response to our drug problem can make a real difference in making our nation healthier and safer. Expanding prevention, treatment and support for people in recovery for substance use disorders will be our guide as we work to address other emerging challenges, including the recent uptick in [heroin](#) use shown in this survey."

**More information:** The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more about [drug abuse and addiction](#).

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