

Younger age at first drug use tied to faster transition to substance use disorder

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Younger age at drug initiation is associated with a faster transition to

substance use disorder (SUD), according to a research letter published online March 29 in *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Nora D. Volkow, M.D., from the U.S. National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, and colleagues used data from the National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (2015 to 2018) to estimate the prevalence of specific SUDs since first [drug use](#) (including tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin) or prescription misuse (including opioids, stimulants, and tranquilizers) in adolescents aged 12 to 17 years and [young adults](#) aged 18 to 25 years.

The researchers found that past-year cannabis use disorder was higher for adolescents than young adults at all examined time frames since first use of the [drug](#). Within 12 months since first cannabis use, 10.7 percent of adolescents had cannabis use disorder versus 6.4 percent of young adults. Similarly, for [prescription drug misuse](#), there was a greater prevalence of past-year SUDs among adolescents than young adults at all examined time frames since first use. Within 12 months since first misuse of prescription drugs, 11.2 percent of adolescents had prescription opioid use disorder versus 6.9 percent of young adults, 13.9 percent of adolescents had prescription stimulant use disorder versus 3.9 percent of young adults, and 11.2 percent of adolescents had prescription tranquilizer use disorder versus 4.7 percent of young adults. A similar prevalence of past-year SUD within 12 months of initiation of alcohol and tobacco was seen for adolescents and young adults.

"Our results identified adolescents as highly vulnerable to SUDs, supporting the need for research to evaluate the efficacy of screening for substance use and SUDs in primary care settings and the timely treatment thereof," the authors write.

One author disclosed stock ownership in General Electric, 3M, and Pfizer.

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