

# Reported drug use among adolescents continued to hold below pre-pandemic levels in 2023

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The percentage of adolescents reporting they used any illicit substances in 2023 continued to hold steady below the pre-pandemic levels reported

in 2020, with 10.9% of eighth graders, 19.8% of 10th graders and 31.2% of 12th graders reporting any illicit drug use in the past year, according to [the latest results](#) from the [Monitoring the Future survey](#).

Reported use for almost all substances decreased dramatically between 2020 and 2021, after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and related changes like school closures and social distancing. In 2022, most reported [substance use](#) among adolescents held steady at these lowered levels, and these latest data show that this trend has continued into 2023.

The Monitoring the Future survey is conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

The 2023 data continue to document stable or declining trends in the use of illicit drugs among [young people](#) over many years. However, importantly, other research has reported a [dramatic rise in overdose deaths among teens between 2010 to 2021](#), which remained elevated well into 2022 according to a [NIDA analysis of CDC and Census data](#).

This increase is largely attributed to illicit fentanyl, a potent synthetic [drug](#), contaminating the supply of counterfeit pills made to resemble prescription medications. Taken together, these data suggest that while drug use is not becoming more common among young people, it is becoming more dangerous.

"Research has shown that delaying the start of substance use among young people, even by one year, can decrease substance use for the rest of their lives. We may be seeing this play out in real-time," said Nora Volkow, M.D., NIDA director. "This trend is reassuring. However, it remains crucial to continue to educate young people about the risks and harms of substance use in an open and honest way, emphasizing that illicit pills and other substances may contain deadly fentanyl."

The Monitoring the Future survey is given annually to students in eighth, 10th, and 12th grades who self-report their substance use behaviors over various time periods, such as past 30 days, past 12 months, and lifetime. The survey also documents students' perceptions of harm, disapproval of use, and perceived availability of drugs. The [survey results](#) are released the same year the data are collected.

From February through June 2023, the Monitoring the Future investigators collected 22,318 surveys from students enrolled across 235 public and private schools in the United States.

When breaking down the data by specific drugs, the survey found that adolescents most commonly reported use of alcohol, nicotine vaping, and cannabis in the past year, and levels generally declined from or held steady with the lowered use reported in 2022. Compared to levels reported in 2022, data reported in 2023 show:

- **Alcohol use** remained stable for eighth and 10th graders, with 15.1% and 30.6% reporting use in the past year respectively, and declined for [12th graders](#), with 45.7% reporting use in the past year (compared to 51.9% in the previous year).
- **Nicotine vaping** remained stable for eighth graders, with 11.4% reporting vaping nicotine in the past year. It declined in the older grades, from 20.5% to 17.6% in 10th grade and from 27.3% to 23.2% in 12th grade.
- **Cannabis** use remained stable for all three grades surveyed, with 8.3% of eighth graders, 17.8% of 10th graders, and 29.0% of 12th graders reporting cannabis use in the past year. Of note, 6.5% of eighth graders, 13.1% of 10th graders, and 19.6% of 12th graders reported **vaping cannabis** within the past year, reflecting a stable trend among all three grades.
- [Delta-8-THC](#) (a psychoactive substance found in the *Cannabis sativa* plant, of which marijuana and hemp are two varieties) use

was measured for the first time in 2023, with 11.4% of 12th graders reporting use in the past year. Beginning in 2024, eighth and 10th graders will also be asked about Delta-8 use.

- **Any illicit drug use other than marijuana** also remained stable for all three grades surveyed, with 4.6% of eighth graders, 5.1% of 10th graders, and 7.4% of 12th graders reporting any [illicit drug use](#) other than marijuana in the past year. These data build on long-term trends documenting low and fairly steady use of [illicit substances](#) reported among teenagers—including past-year use of cocaine, heroin, and misuse of prescription drugs, generally.
- **Use of narcotics other than heroin (including Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, etc.)** decreased among 12th graders, with 1.0% reporting use within the past year (matching the all-time low reported in 2021 and down from a high of 9.5% in 2004).
- **Abstaining**, or not using, marijuana, alcohol, and nicotine increased for 12th graders, with 62.6% reporting abstaining from any use of these substances over the past month. This percentage remained stable for eighth and 10th graders, with 87.0% and 76.9% reporting abstaining from any use of marijuana, alcohol, and nicotine over the past month.

"For 49 consecutive years, the Monitoring the Future survey has closely monitored shifts in substance use trends among young people, helping to identify and track emerging trends with public health relevance," said Richard A. Miech, Ph.D., team lead of the Monitoring the Future study at the University of Michigan.

"This year's addition of a measure to assess the use of delta-8 is one example of this, and we were surprised to see use levels this high among 12th graders. Moving forward, as policies and access to this drug change, it will be important to continue to monitor the use of this drug among teens."

Though the sample size of 22,318 respondents in 2023 was lower than the sample size of a typical pre-pandemic year's data collection, the results were gathered from a nationally representative sample, and the data were statistically weighted to provide national numbers.

This year, 13% of students who took the survey identified as Black or African American, 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 3% as Asian, 25% as Hispanic, 1% as Middle Eastern, 41% as white, and 16% as more than one of the preceding categories. The survey also asks respondents to identify as male, female, other, or prefer not to answer.

For the 2023 survey, 48% of students identified as male, 47% identified as female, 1% identified as other, and 4% selected the "prefer not to answer" option.

The Monitoring the Future investigators note that schools opt-in to participate in the survey, and some schools that had historically participated opted out in the years following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. All participating students took the survey via the web—either on tablets or on a computer—with 98% of respondents taking the survey in person in school in 2023. Therefore, students with less engagement in school—a known risk factor for [drug use](#)—may have been less likely to participate in the [survey](#).

**More information:** The [2023 Monitoring the Future data tables](#) highlighting the survey results are available online from the University of Michigan.

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