

NSDUH Data Show Most Adolescents in the United States Are Not Using Substances

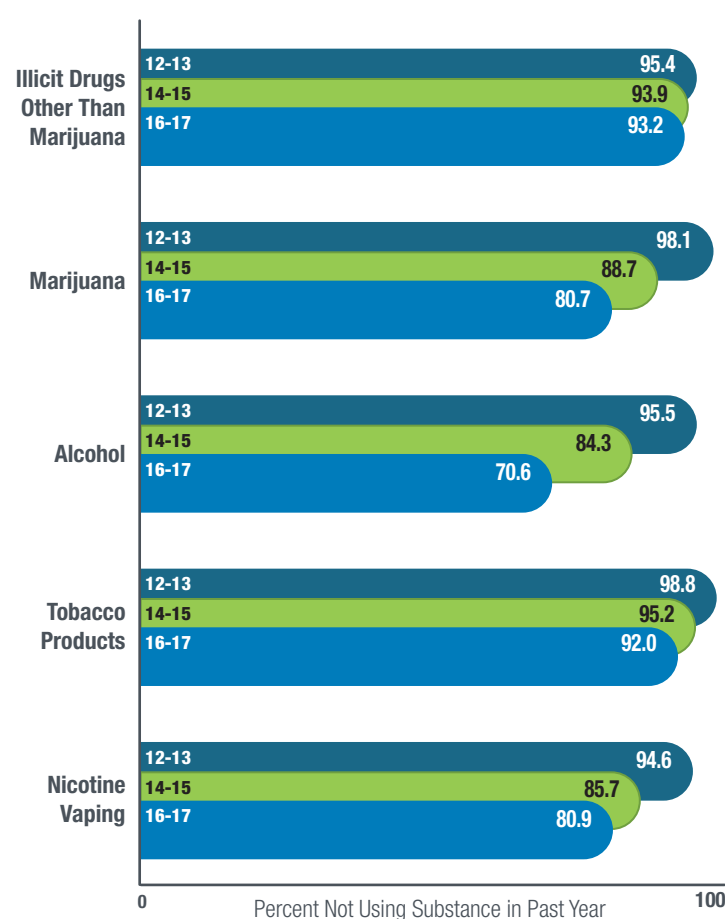
Data highlight a crucial period for implementing substance use prevention strategies

There is a common perception that adolescents in the United States are using substances. Data from the 2023 NSDUH, however, show that the vast majority of adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the United States did not use substances in the past year. In 2023, 73% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 did not use illicit drugs, marijuana, or tobacco products; drink alcohol; or vape nicotine in the past year. Among adolescents aged 12 or 13, 88% did not use any of these substances.

Although few adolescents overall are using substances, NSDUH data show that as adolescents age, the percentage of adolescents who have used substances in the past year increases. For example, 98% of 12- to 13-year-olds did not use marijuana in the past year. However, this percentage drops to 89% among 14- to 15-year-olds and 81% among 16- to 17-year-olds. Similar differences are seen for alcohol and nicotine vaping in the past year.

NSDUH data highlight that although the majority of adolescents are not using substances, prevention efforts are still needed. As adolescents age, the percentage who use substances increases, illustrating the importance of implementing prevention strategies early and throughout adolescence. Continued prevention programming, education, and public messaging focused on adolescents can delay or prevent substance use and avoid the negative impacts of substance use that have been widely documented.¹

Past Year Substance Nonuse: Among Adolescents Aged 12 to 17; by Age Group, 2023



Definitions

Illicit drugs other than marijuana includes the use of cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, and methamphetamine, as well as the misuse of prescription drugs (pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives). **Misuse of prescription drugs** means use in any way not directed by a doctor, such as use without a prescription of one's own, or use in greater amounts, more often, or longer than told to take a drug. Estimates for illicit drug use and misuse of prescription drugs do not include illegally made fentanyl.

Tobacco product use includes the use of cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, cigars, or pipe tobacco. It does not include the use of e-cigarettes or another vaping device to vape nicotine.

Nicotine vaping includes the use of e-cigarettes or another vaping device to vape nicotine.

Reference

1. The Guide to Community Preventive Services. (2024). *Substance use: Community interventions involving coalitions or partnerships to prevent substance use among youth*. <https://thecommunityguide.org/findings/substance-use-community-interventions-involving-coalitions-or-partnerships-to-prevent-substance-use-among-youth.html> ↗

Data Source

The **National Survey on Drug Use and Health** (NSDUH) is a household survey of people aged 12 or older. NSDUH collects information on substance use, mental health, and receipt of substance use and mental health treatment in the United States. NSDUH uses a complex sampling method. Interviews are conducted in person and via the web. Estimates presented are weighted to represent the noninstitutionalized, civilian U.S. population.