

Youth Substance Use Rates and Trends

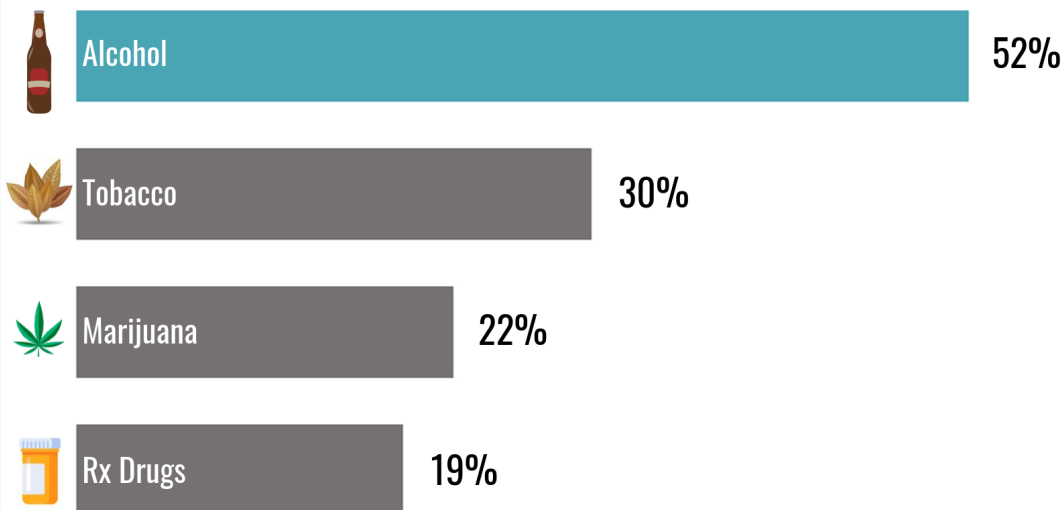
To better understand patterns of substance use among Texas youth, Texans For Safe and Drug-Free Youth (TxSDY) continues to monitor use rates and trends using a variety of data sources. Primarily, TxSDY compiles statewide data from the Texas School Survey of Substance Use Among Students (TSS), conducted by the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M every two years.

It should be noted that changes in the 2016 Texas School Survey reporting procedures resulted in a more accurate representation of use rates among middle and high school students. However, the changes also resulted in apparent increases in prevalence and recency of use among students. Additionally, the changes make it difficult to compare current use rates to those from surveys prior to 2016. Nonetheless, the data continue to show that alcohol remains the most commonly used substance among youth (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Texas Students use alcohol more than any other drug.

More than half of 7th-12th graders have used alcohol at some point in their lives.



Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

Looking at trends over time, there has been an overall steady decline in youth substance use, which suggests prevention efforts over the last decade have had – and continue to have – a positive impact on youth alcohol use. However, to maintain the decline we must continue implementing evidence-based prevention strategies that work at both the individual and community levels.

Alcohol Use

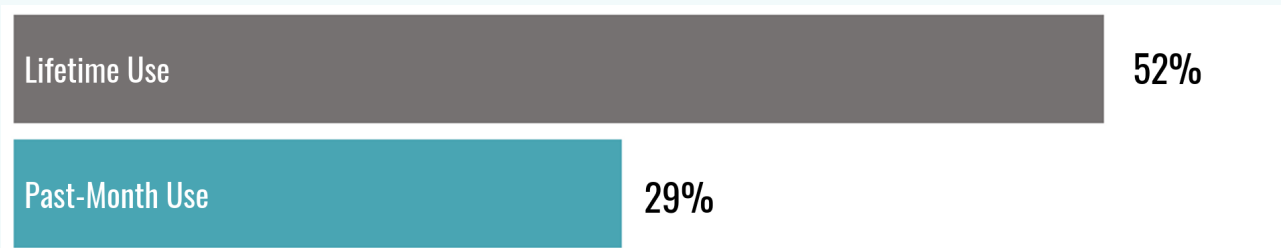
According to the 2018 Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use (TSS), 52% of Texas middle and high school students have used alcohol at least once in their lifetime and 29% say they drank alcohol in the past month (Figure 2).

Use rates among Texas youth are higher than national youth rates, with about 30% of high school seniors nationally reporting they had alcohol in the past month (Monitoring the Future, 2018) compared to 47% of high school seniors in Texas (TSS, 2018).

Figure 2

More than half of 7th-12th graders have used alcohol.

Nearly **one-third** say they currently use (past-month use) alcohol.



Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

Prevention efforts that reduce youth access to alcohol are especially important because 47% of youth in Texas say alcohol is “somewhat easy” or “very easy” to obtain. As students get older, ease of access increases: among high school seniors, 65% report alcohol is “somewhat easy” or “very easy” to obtain (Table 1). Strategies that reduce youth access to alcohol include increasing the price of alcohol through alcohol excise tax increases, prohibiting drink specials, enforcing minimum purchase age laws, and holding social hosts accountable for providing alcohol or allowing underage drinking to occur on their property.

Table 1.

Nearly half of Texas youth say it’s easy to get alcohol.

By the time they’re seniors in high school, nearly **two-thirds** of students say it’s easy to access alcohol.

	Somewhat Easy	Very Easy	Total
All	19%	28%	47%
Grade 7	12%	12%	24%
Grade 8	17%	19%	36%
Grade 9	19%	29%	48%
Grade 10	21%	31%	53%
Grade 11	23%	37%	60%
Grade 12	24%	41%	65%

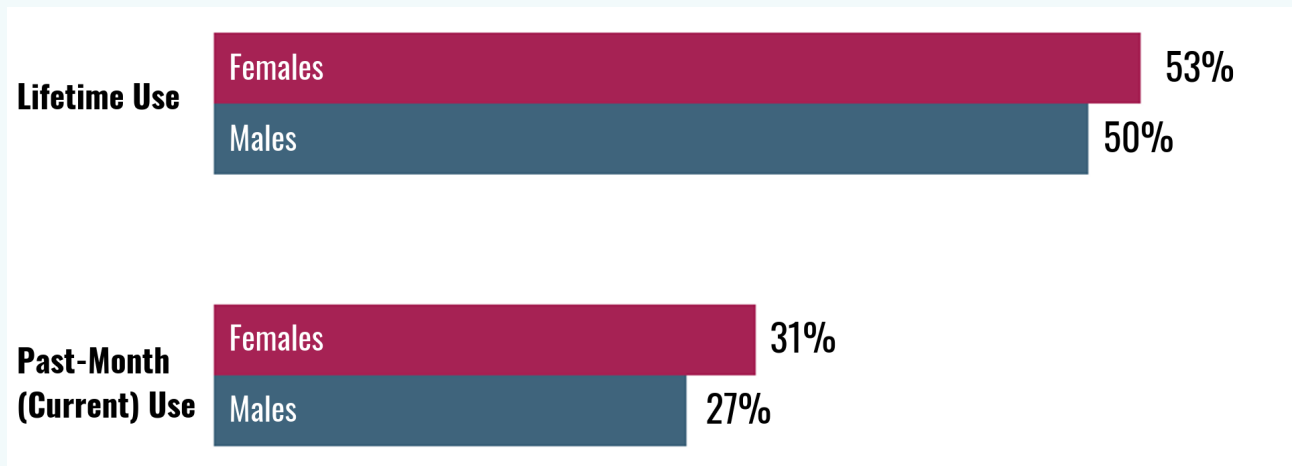
Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

Gender Differences in Alcohol Use

More teen girls have tried alcohol than teen boys. In 2018, 31% of female students drank in the past 30 days compared to 27% of male students (Figure 3). Similarly, a larger proportion of female students (53%) reported drinking alcohol in their lifetime compared to male students (50%). Long-term data show that drinking rates have been declining for both boys and girls, but girls have had slightly higher rates of drinking than boys since 2002.

Figure 3

More teen girls report using alcohol than teen boys.



Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

This gender gap seen among Texas youth holds true nationally as well. In the U.S., 32% of high school girls report drinking in the past month compared to 28% of high school boys (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017).

This gender difference is likely related to differences in exposure to alcohol marketing. According to the Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY), girls see more ads for alcohol in magazines than boys do (2012). Underage girls even see more alcohol advertising in magazines than adult women who are of legal drinking age (CAMY, 2012).

Binge-Drinking

Binge-drinking, defined here as having 5 or more drinks in a two-hour period, is especially concerning because this high level of consumption is associated with greater risk of alcohol related harms. Binge-drinking raises blood alcohol levels above the legal limit within two hours, if not sooner (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], Drinking Levels Defined) Moderate and Binge Drinking). Teens and young adults that binge drink are more likely to engage in other risky behaviors (NIAAA, 2006).

According to the 2018 TSS, 12% of middle and high school students report binge-drinking at least once in the past 30-days. Among high school seniors, this percentage is higher at 24% (Table 2).

Table 2.

1 in 10 Texas middle and high school students say they currently binge drink (past-month use).

Nearly **one quarter** of high school seniors say they currently binge drink.

	Past-Month Binge Drinking
All	12%
Grade 7	4%
Grade 8	6%
Grade 9	10%
Grade 10	13%
Grade 11	16%
Grade 12	24%

Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

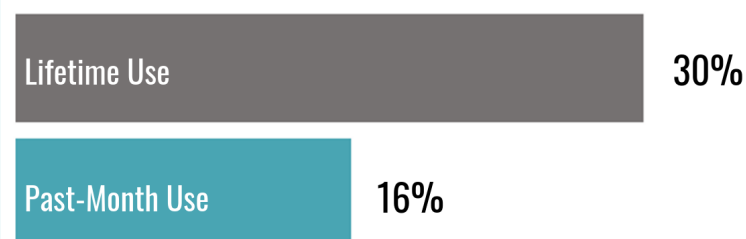
Tobacco Use

In 2018, 16% of middle and high school students used tobacco in the past 30 days. Lifetime tobacco use among students was 30% (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Nearly one-third of 7th-12th graders have used tobacco.

Approximately **1 in 6** Texas students are current (past-month) tobacco users.



Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

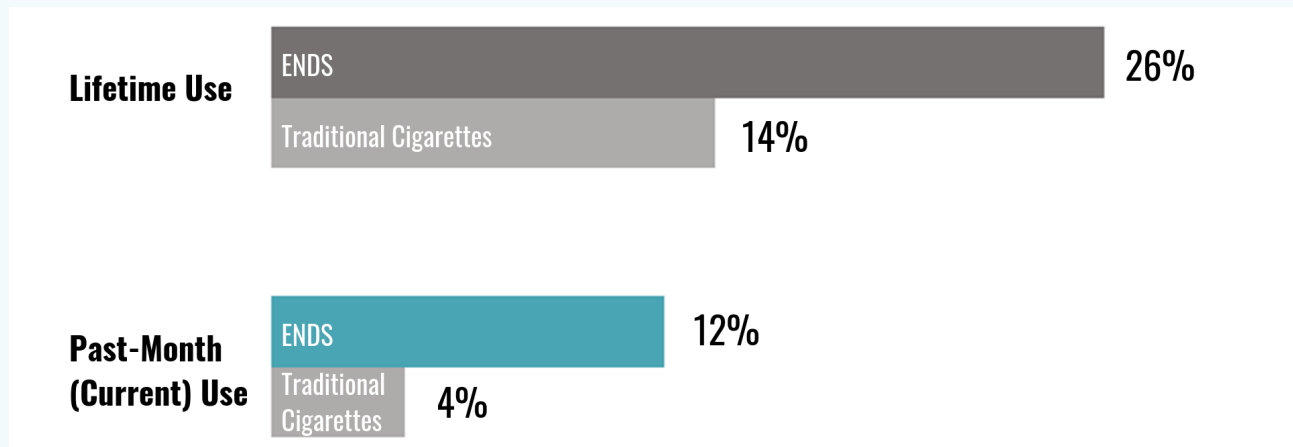
Electronic vapor products, often referred to as electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), include e-cigarettes, personal vaporizers, vape pens, e-cigars, e-hookah, and other devices that produce an aerosolized mixture containing flavored liquids and nicotine. They are relatively new products that continue to grow in number and popularity, especially among young users. In less than a decade, the rise in the use of ENDS, coupled with a lack of knowledge about the effects of using them, has led to a major public health concern.

Recent survey data show that ENDS are now more commonly used by youth than traditional cigarettes. In Texas, 26% of middle and high school students have used an ENDS at some point in their lifetime; 12% have used one on the past month (TSS, 2018). In comparison, this same survey shows lifetime use of cigarettes at 14% and past month use at 4% (Figure 5).

Figure 5.

More students use ENDS (e.g., e-cigarettes) than traditional cigarettes.

Three times as many students currently use ENDS than traditional cigarettes.



Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

In fact, ENDS are now the most commonly used type of tobacco when compared to cigarettes, hookah, smokeless tobacco, and snus (a flavored smokeless tobacco that does not require spitting). One of the reasons this is concerning is because research shows that youth who use start using ENDS may later shift to using traditional cigarettes or other tobacco products.

This high use of ENDS by youth is likely due to a combination of factors. Though there are minimum age laws for purchasing or using ENDS, the products themselves are not yet regulated. Additionally, these electronic devices use marketing tactics that appeal to youth, such as cartoons, celebrity endorsements, promotion of fruit and candy flavors, and sleek new designs. For example, Juul, the most popular brand on the market, has a design that resembles USB flash drives, making them harder to detect among students in classrooms or at home.

Though ENDS are often marketed as a “safer” product than traditional cigarettes, they still contain nicotine and other chemicals, and they are addictive. In recent months, more information about the potential harms of these products has emerged as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began investigating the outbreak of lung injury associated with e-cigarette use or vaping. This news has prompted the CDC and several

other public health organizations to recommend that individuals refrain from using ENDS while the investigation is ongoing (CDC, 2019).

Still, product marketing efforts seem to be paying off, as only 67% of middle and high school students perceive ENDS as “somewhat” or “very” dangerous. This number is notably lower than the perception of danger around tobacco products as a whole (85%), alcohol (80%), marijuana (70%), and prescription drugs (88%). (Table 3)

Table 3.

Texas students’ perception of danger varies by substance.

They perceive electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) to be the **least dangerous** substance.

	Somewhat Dangerous	Very Dangerous	Total
Alcohol	30%	49%	79%
Tobacco	24%	61%	85%
Marijuana	14%	56%	70%
Prescription Drugs	13%	75%	88%
ENDS	12%	55%	67%

Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

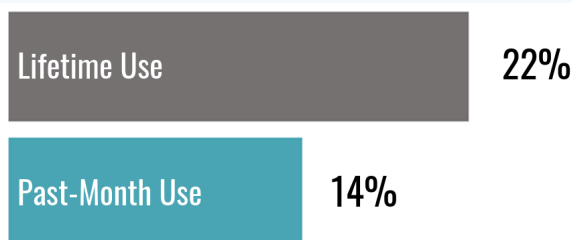
Marijuana Use

Marijuana is the most frequently used illicit drug among Texas middle and high school students: 22% say they have used marijuana at some point in their lifetimes, and 14% report using it in the past 30 days (Figure 6). These numbers show a slight increase from 2016 (21% and 12%, respectively), which mirrors national trends as well.

Figure 6.

More than one-fifth of Texas middle and high schoolers have used marijuana.

14% of Texas students say they currently use (past-month use) marijuana.



Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

Nationally, rates of marijuana use among students increased to 24% in 2017. This 1.3% increase marks the first significant uptick in adolescent marijuana use in seven years (Monitoring the Future, 2017). However, the increase does not come as a surprise since attitudes about marijuana have shifted to be more favorable. Specifically, across the U.S., fewer youth perceive marijuana to be risky, and disapproval of others who use marijuana has also decreased (Monitoring the Future, 2018).

In Texas, 70% of students think marijuana is “somewhat dangerous” or “very dangerous,” which is lower than the percentage of students who believe alcohol and tobacco are “somewhat” or “very” dangerous (79% and 85%, respectively). (See Table 3 on page 6.)

The shifting policy landscape around marijuana has resulted in increased concern around youth access to and use of the drug. So much so that in August of 2019, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory about marijuana use and the developing brain. Specifically, the Surgeon General highlighted the harms of frequent marijuana use during adolescence, including:

- Changes in the brain that affect attention, memory, decision-making, and motivation
- Impaired learning abilities
- Declines in IQ, school performance, and life satisfaction
- Increased rates of school absence and drop-out
- Increased rates of suicide attempts
- Increased risk of psychotic disorders
- Greater likelihood of opioid misuse

As a result, the Surgeon General believes that, “Marijuana’s increasingly widespread availability and highly potent forms, coupled with a false and dangerous perception of safety among youth, merits a nationwide call to attention.” With the shifting norms and laws around marijuana use in the U.S, youth use rates and perceptions need to be continually monitored in order to effectively target marijuana prevention efforts. Though data suggest that support for legalization continues to increase, a 2019 survey of Texas voters shows that people’s higher priority is protecting youth.

Prescription Drug Abuse

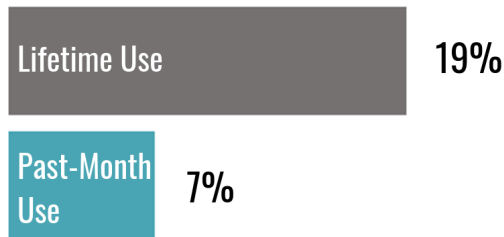
Prescription drug abuse refers to the non-prescribed use of medications, including narcotics, tranquilizers, sedatives, and/or amphetamines, for the feelings or experience they cause rather than their intended medical purposes. Prescription drug abuse has gained more attention in recent years because abuse rates, prescriptions for controlled substances, and overdoses showed a significant increase in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In Texas, 19% of middle and high school students say they have used prescription drugs not prescribed to them at some point in their lifetime; 7% say they have done so in the past month (Figure 7).

Figure 7.

Nearly 20% of 7th-12th graders have used prescription drugs that weren't prescribed to them.

7% of Texas students say they currently use (past-month use) prescription drugs not prescribed to them.



Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

Among Texas youth, the most commonly abused prescription drug is codeine cough syrup, followed by benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium or Xanax), then stimulants (e.g., Adderall and Ritalin), then painkillers (e.g., OxyContin, percodan, and hydrocodone). (Table 4.)

Table 4.

Codeine cough syrup is the most commonly abused prescription drug among Texas youth.

Painkillers are the **least** commonly abused prescription drug among students.

	Lifetime Use	Past 30-Day Use
Codeine Cough Syrup	13%	4%
Benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium or Xanax)	5%	2%
Stimulants (e.g., Adderall and Ritalin)	4%	2%
Painkillers (e.g., OxyContin, Percodan, hydrocodone)	4%	1%

Source: PPRI, Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use, 2018

The good news is that most middle and high school students are aware of the dangers associated with using prescription drugs that have not been prescribed to them: 88% believe it is “somewhat dangerous” or “very dangerous” (TSS, 2018). This means middle and high school students believe using prescription drugs is more dangerous than using alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana (See Table 3 on page 6).

Although prescription drug abuse rates do not show a rapid increase, abuse of prescription drugs remains a concern, particularly among groups with high rates of binge and risky drinking - such as youth and college students – due to the heightened risk of overdose when combined with alcohol. Additionally, research

indicates that abuse of opioid medicines, such as hydrocodone and oxycodone, may lead to heroin use. Therefore, along with prescriptive drug abuse rates, heroin use will need continued monitoring.

Though there the mounting concern regarding prescription drug and opioid misuse among youth is warranted, it is important to remember that alcohol is still the drug young people use most frequently. While it is necessary to address growing opioid and prescription drug misuse among teens, we cannot forget that alcohol continues to be the source of most harm for our children.

To learn more, contact us at info@TxSDY.org
or visit us online at TxSDY.org.

Resources

- 1 Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. (n.d.). Alcohol Advertising and Youth Fact Sheet. Available at <http://www.camy.org/resources/fact-sheets/alcohol-advertising-and-youth/>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.
- 2 Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. (2012). Women, Girls, and Alcohol Fact Sheet. Available at <http://www.camy.org/resources/fact-sheets/women-girls-and-alcohol/>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.
- 3 Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. (2010). Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising on Television, 2001-2009. Revised July 23, 2012.
- 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (n.d.) 1991-2017 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.
- 5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2019). Outbreak of Lung Injury Associated with E-Cigarette Use, or Vaping. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/severe-lung-disease.html. Accessed on October 4, 2019.
- 6 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (n.d.). Drinking Levels Defined. Available at <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/moderate-binge-drinking>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.
- 7 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2006). "Underage drinking: Why do adolescents drink, what are the risks, and how can underage drinking be prevented?" Alcohol Alert 67, January 2006.
- 8 Public Policy Research Institute. (2018). Texas School Survey of Drug and Alcohol Use: 2018. Available at <https://texasschoolsurvey.org/Documents/Reports/State/18State712.pdf>. Accessed on October 14, 2019.
- 9 United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General. (2019). U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory: Marijuana Use and the Developing Brain. Available at <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.
- 10 University of Michigan. (2013). Monitoring the Future, Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use, 2018 Overview. Available at <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/mtf-overview2018.pdf>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.