

2012 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey Facts about Alcohol, Other Drugs and Suicidal Behaviors

Background: *In the Fall of 2012 more than 200,000 students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 took the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey. The survey is administered every two years in public schools.*

Alcohol use has dropped among all grades surveyed since 2010:

- Nearly 11,000 fewer students are using alcohol compared to 2010. This is equivalent to six large high schools in Washington.
- Alcohol use peaked in 1998 and is currently at the lowest levels since the survey began in 1990:
 - 6th: 2.5%
 - 8th: 12%
 - 10th: 23%
 - 12th: 36%
- Since 1998, drinking among 8th and 10th graders has dropped by half, and use among 6th graders has dropped from 14% to 2.5%.
- Since 1998, the percentage of 10th graders who binge drink (five or more drinks in a row) has dropped from 28% to 14%.
- More students believe drinking is risky: 43% of 10th graders believe there is great risk in having one or two drinks every day, compared to 39% in 2010.

There is more we can do to protect kids:

- More than 115,000 youth (12-17 year olds) used alcohol in the past 30 days.
- Nearly one in five 12th graders (19%) has been drunk or high at school, along with 15% of 10th graders.
- Teens most often get alcohol from friends, and from home without permission.

As teens get older, parents need to keep talking :

- 40% of 8th graders say their parents have talked to them more than once about not drinking.
- By the time students are in 12th grade, only 29% say their parents talk to them about alcohol.

Too many teens are drinking and driving:

- One in 10 12th graders (11%) drove a vehicle after drinking.
- About one in five students rode in a car with a driver who had been drinking:
 - 21% of 12th graders.
 - 19% of 10th graders.
 - 17% of 8th graders.

Teens use marijuana more than tobacco:

- Marijuana use among 10th graders (19%) and 12th graders (27%) is almost double the percentage who smoke cigarettes.
- Fewer students in grades 8, 10 and 12 perceive a great risk of harm in using marijuana regularly. Among 10th graders the perception of harm fell from 65% in 2000 to 46% in 2012.
- More than half of 10th graders report it is easy to get marijuana.
- Historically, as perception of harm goes down, use goes up.

Fewer teens are abusing prescription drugs:

- Abuse of prescription painkillers among 10th graders dropped from 9.5% in 2008 to 6% in 2012.
- Teens who abuse prescription drugs most often get them from their own prescriptions, or from friends.

A high number of teens have depressive feelings, and many have attempted suicide:

- More than one in four students had feelings of hopelessness for two or more weeks in the past year.
- Over 100,000 youth (12-17 year olds) seriously considered suicide in the past year, which is about one in every six students:
 - 17% of 8th graders
 - 19% of 10th graders
 - 17% of 12th graders
- Between 13-14% of students in grades 8, 10 and 12 made a suicide plan in the past year.
- About 8% of 8th and 10th graders attempted suicide in the past year.

Why does it matter if teens use alcohol or other drugs?

The link to serious injuries and death: One in five teen drivers involved in fatal crashes has alcohol in their system (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Because teens tend to have less body mass, they are at higher risk for alcohol overdose.

The link to depression and suicide: Suicide is the second leading cause of death in Washington for youth ages 15 to 24 (Washington State Department of Health). Teens who use alcohol or other drugs are at higher risk for depression and suicide. The majority of suicide is preventable ([Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration - SAMHSA](#)).

The link to sexual activity: Young people who use alcohol are more likely to have unintended, unwanted and unprotected sex ([SAMHSA](#)).

The link to dependency: Alcohol has a greater impact on the developing brain. Teens who drink before the age of 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol dependence as an adult, compared to those who start drinking at age 21 or older (SAMHSA).

The link to school performance: Heavy drinking and use of marijuana can lead to difficulty learning, remembering and problem-solving. Students who regularly use alcohol or other drugs are 3 to 5 times more likely to skip school than students who don't use drugs. Marijuana smokers get lower grades and are less likely to graduate (SAMHSA).

What Can I Do to Prevent Teen Alcohol and Drug Use?

Talking to teens about alcohol and other drugs can be hard, but if you don't talk, someone else will. Teens are told many inaccurate things about drugs, such as "everyone is doing it" or "it can't hurt you." Teens overestimate how many of their peers are drinking or using drugs. Most are making healthy choices. Here are some steps you can take:

- Communicate. Listen carefully, and discuss any problems they (or their friends) are having with drugs and alcohol. Parents are the number one influence on their children's decisions about alcohol – get tips for talking with teens at www.StartTalkingNow.org.
- Involve yourself. Participate in church, school and parent groups. Communicate with the parents of your teen's friends. Know where your teens are and who they are with.
- Be a good role model. Send teens a message that you can celebrate and have fun without drinking, by doing it yourself.
- Be careful of the messages you send. Refrain from statements such as "I had a terrible day—I need a drink."
- Love your children unconditionally. Let teens know you value them, even in times of trouble.
- Devote time. Help with homework, reading, sports or just talking.
- Encourage and help build your teen's self esteem. Help teens to act independently and resist peer pressure. Encourage them to fulfill their hopes, dreams and goals.
- Teach and practice refusal skills. Role-play how to say no and remind kids what your values are about alcohol and drug use.
- Provide consistent and accurate information about specific drugs, and establish clear family rules.

What Can I Do to Prevent Teen Suicide?

Parents, friends, teachers, and coaches can make a difference by taking these steps:

Watch for warning signs:

- Previous suicide attempts, talk of suicide, or making a plan.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Expressions of hopelessness, helplessness or anger at oneself or the world.
- Themes of death or depression in conversation, writing, reading or art.
- Statements of not being missed if dead.
- Recent loss of a friend, family member or parent, through death or divorce.
- Alcohol or other drug use.
- Chronic headaches, stomachaches, fatigue.

Show you care:

- Often, suicidal thinking comes from a wish to end deep psychological pain. Death seems like the only way out, but it isn't.
- Let the person know you really care. Talk about your feelings and ask about his or hers.
- Listen carefully to what they have to say.

Ask the question:

- Don't hesitate to raise the subject. Talking with young people about suicide won't put the idea in their heads.
- Be direct in a caring way. Ask if they are thinking about suicide, if they really want to die, or if they simply want their problems to go away.
- Learn more about preventing youth suicide at www.yspp.org.

Get Help:

Call the **Washington State Recovery Help Line** for free, confidential crisis counseling and referrals to treatment for substance use or mental health conditions: **1-866-789-1511** or **Teenline: 1-866-833-6546**.