



Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
An Agency of the Government of Alberta

Backgrounder

Edmonton, June 24, 2003

Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2002

In the Fall of 2002, AADAC commissioned the Alberta Youth Experience Survey, a comprehensive study of alcohol, tobacco, other drug, and gambling behaviour. The study included measures of use and abuse as well as factors that protect from or increase the risk of use and abuse. The percentage of Alberta youth who use substances or participate in gambling activities is presented here.

Percent of Alberta youth who have used substances or participated in gambling activities at least once in the last 12 months

	Overall	Grades 7 - 9	Grades 10 - 12
Used Alcohol			
Alcohol	56.3	35.8	75.4
Used Tobacco			
Smoked cigarettes	16.2	7.2	24.6
Chewing tobacco or snuff	7.8	4.3	11.0
Used Cannabis			
Cannabis (Marijuana or hash)	27.6	11.8	41.9
Used Other Drugs			
Magic mushrooms or mescaline	10.4	5.0	15.3
Inhalants	5.6	6.8	4.6
Club drugs (ecstasy or crystal meth)	5.3	2.7	7.6
Uppers without a prescription	4.0	2.1	5.6
Hallucinogens	3.9	1.6	6.1
Cocaine	2.9	0.5	5.1
Crack	2.8	0.8	4.7
Downers without a prescription	2.3	1.7	2.9
Heroin or opium	1.4	1.1	1.7
Steroids	1.2	0.7	1.6
Participated in Gambling Activities			
Scratch tabs	30.8	25.9	35.4
Cards for money	23.0	18.5	27.1
Bet on sporting events with a friend	21.1	18.2	23.7
Bingo	9.5	11.8	7.3
Any other lottery	6.7	5.7	7.6
Sports Select lottery	3.7	1.9	5.4
Video lottery terminals (VLTs)	3.3	1.4	5.1
Bet on sporting events on-line	3.2	3.2	3.3

While over half of adolescents drank alcohol at least once in the past 12 months (56% drank, 44% did not), most adolescents did not smoke, use cannabis (marijuana or hash), other drugs, nor did they gamble in the year before taking the survey. A minority of adolescents did use cannabis (marijuana or hash) (27%), smoked cigarettes (16%), used magic mushrooms or mescaline (10%), played Scratch Tabs (31%), played cards for money with friends (23%) bet on sports with friends (21%) or played bingo (9.5%). In all cases except for the use of inhalants, adolescents in grades 10-12 were more likely to use substances or gamble than were adolescents in grades 7 – 9. Inhalant use was more common among adolescents in grades 7-9 (8%) than among adolescents in grades 10-12 (4%).

The following table compares the results of recent Canadian school surveys of adolescent substance use and gambling. In making comparisons, there are a number of important differences between surveys to keep in mind:

- The surveys were conducted in using somewhat different questionnaires and methods.
- The school grades included varied between surveys. This is an important distinction because the use of alcohol and other drugs is generally known to increase with age.
- With the above limitations in mind, the following observations can be made:
 - Alcohol use by Alberta adolescents surveyed was much lower than in Ontario (56.3% vs. 65.6%)
 - The Alberta youth smoking rate (16.2%) was lower than Ontario (23.6%)
 - Cannabis (marijuana or hash) use is lower in Alberta (27.6%) than Ontario (29.8%) and Nova Scotia (36.5%)
 - Use of illicit drugs by young Albertans is lower than in Ontario and Nova Scotia but is still of concern
 - VLT use ranged from 3% in Alberta to 8% in Ontario.

Percent of selected past year substance use and gambling activity among youth in Alberta, Ontario and Nova Scotia, by Province¹

Used Substances	Alberta, 2002	Ontario, 2001	Nova Scotia, 2002
Alcohol	56.3	65.6	51.7
Cannabis (Marijuana or hash)	27.6	29.8	36.5
Smoked cigarettes	16.2	23.6	23.2
Magic mushrooms/mescaline	10.4	11.4	12.2
Chewing tobacco or snuff	7.8	NA	4.8%
Inhalants	5.6	5.7	4.9
Club drugs (ecstasy, crystal meth)	5.3	6.0	4.4
Uppers without a prescription	4.0	6.4	9.3
Hallucinogens	3.9	4.5	5.5
Cocaine	2.9	4.3	3.9
Crack	2.8	2.0	NA
Downers without a prescription	2.3	3.9	4.7
Heroin or opium	1.4	1.0	1.6
Steroids	1.2	NA	2.7

Participated in Gambling Activities			
Scratch tabs	30.8	NA	42.6
Cards for money	23.0	25.7	32.2
Bet on sporting events with a friend	21.1	22.3	28.4
Bingo	9.5	11.9	22.6
Other lottery	6.7	24.5	16.2
Sports Select lottery	3.7	10.3	9.6
Video lottery terminals (VLTs)	3.3	7.7	7.4
Bet on sporting events on-line	3.2	NA	NA

¹ Includes any reported substance use in the 12-month period preceding the survey.

The most effective prevention and intervention projects focus on risk and protective factors within five major life domains: individual, family, peer, school, and community. The Table below summarizes the factors within these domains.

- **Risk factors** are defined as either life events or experiences that are statistically associated with an increase in problematic behaviours such as alcohol and other drug use.
- **Protective factors** are defined as life events or experiences that mediate or moderate the effect of exposure to risk factors.

In the past the emphasis of adolescent addictions research has been on risk factors associated with adolescent substance use. Recent research indicates the need for a broader perspective encompassing both risk factors and protective factors. Protective factors may function as a buffer highlighting the interactive relationship between risk and protective factors. The severity, frequency, and duration of both risk and protective factors impacts the adolescent's ability to remain resilient against alcohol or other drug use. Continued research examining the most relevant risk and protective factors will aid youth initiatives to develop innovative and improved program solutions for this vulnerable population.

Summary of key risk and protective factors for substance and gambling abuse, in order of influence

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Age	Parental monitoring
Peer risk behaviour	Social skills
Family history of substance abuse	Participation in pro-social activities
Family discord	Availability of pro-social activities
School disconnection	School marks
Poor father's support	School connection
Grade at first use of cigarettes	Positive adults in neighbourhoods
Grade at first use of cannabis	Peer influence on decision making
Signs of early leaving school early	
Poor mother's support	

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