

PATS KEY FINDINGS: Released May 2, 2012
2011 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation

The 23rd annual Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation, found that past-month marijuana use – particularly heavy use – has increased significantly among U.S. high school students since 2008. 9 percent of teens (nearly 1.5 million) smoked marijuana heavily (at least 20 times) in the past month. Overall, past-month heavy marijuana use is up 80 percent among U.S. teens since 2008.

Concerning Trends in Teen Marijuana Use According to the New PATS Data (2008-2011)

- Past-month use is up 42 percent (up from 19 percent in 2008 to 27 percent in 2011, which translates to about 4 million teens).
- Past-year use is up 26 percent (up from 31 percent in 2008 to 39 percent in 2011, which translates to about 6 million teens).
- Lifetime use is up 21 percent (up from 39 percent in 2008 to 47 percent in 2011, which translates to nearly 8 million teens).

Teen Marijuana Use Has Become a Normalized Behavior

- Teens now report seeing more of their peers smoking marijuana and only 26 percent agree with the statement, “in my school, most teens don’t smoke marijuana” (down from 37 percent in 2008).
- 71 percent of teens say they have friends who use marijuana regularly (up from 64 percent in 2008).

Teen past-month “heavy” marijuana users are significantly more likely than teens who have not used marijuana in the past year to:

- use cocaine/crack (30 times more likely)
- use Ecstasy (20 times more likely)
- abuse prescription pain relievers (15 times more likely)
- abuse over-the-counter medicines (14 times more likely)

Social disapproval of marijuana among teens remained the same:

- 61 percent of teens say they disapprove of their peers using marijuana (About 41 percent say they ‘strongly disapprove’)
- Only about half of teens (51 percent) say they see “great risk” in using marijuana, down significantly from 61 percent in 2005

Teen Rx Medicine Abuse Remains High, but Relatively Unchanged, Parents Not Safeguarding Medicines at Home and Misusing Rx Medications Themselves

- Teen lifetime abuse of medicines is plateauing and holding steady at 17 percent for Rx drugs and 12 percent for OTC cough and cold medicines.
- Among teens, past year abuse of the prescription pain relievers Vicodin and OxyContin has plateaued at about 10 percent.

- The number of parents who agree with the statement “anyone can access prescription medicines in the medicine cabinet” is up from 50 percent in 2010 to 64 percent 2011, meaning the medications are more readily available to anyone in their homes.
- Fewer parents also report communicating the risks of getting high, or any other reason for abuse, from prescription medicines with their children; down from 82 percent who said they communicated the risks of Rx drug abuse to their kids in 2009 to 69 percent in 2011.
- The number of parents who say they “keep alcohol locked in a cabinet at home” is also down from 32 percent in 2009 to 25 percent in 2011.
- More than one in ten parents (15 percent) say they’ve used an Rx medication not prescribed for them at least once in the past year, a 25 percent increase from 2010 to 2011.

Teen Boys and Hispanic Teens Leading Marijuana Increases, Fewer Teen Girls Abusing Rx Medicines

- Past year marijuana use among teen boys is up 24 percent (from 34 percent in 2008 to 42 percent in 2011)
- Past month use among teen boys is up 38 percent (from 21 percent in 2008 to 29 percent in 2011).
- Boys’ heavy use – smoking marijuana at least 20 times a month – is higher than that of their female counterparts (11 percent for teen boys vs. 6 percent for teen girls) and boys’ heavy marijuana use is up an alarming 57 percent, from 7 percent in 2008 to 11 percent in 2011.
- Half of Hispanic teens (50 percent) report that they have used marijuana in the past year (versus 40 percent for African Americans and 35 percent for Caucasians). This means Hispanic teens are nearly twice as likely (43 percent) as Caucasian teens to have smoked marijuana in the past year (50 percent vs. 35 percent) and 25 percent more likely than African-American teens.
- Teen girls’ abuse of a prescription drug “to get high or alter your mood” is down 30 percent since 2010 (from 23 percent in 2010 to 16 percent in 2011) and is down a total of 24 percent since 2009 (21 percent in 2009). Rx drug abuse among teen boys has remained relatively flat over the same time period.
- Teens are starting to view medicine abuse as less socially acceptable and the percentage of teens who “strongly disapprove” of peers using prescription drugs to get high has gone up significantly – from 52 percent in 2010 to 58 percent in 2011.
- Fewer also say it’s “very” or “fairly” easy for teens to get prescription pain relievers, down 25 percent from 57 percent in 2008 to 43 percent in 2011.

Mixed Results on Teen Abuse of Cigarettes, Inhalants, Alcohol, Meth, Cocaine/Crack, Ecstasy

- Smoking rates have declined with 22 percent of teens reporting smoking cigarettes in the past month – this is down 19 percent from 27 percent last year.
- Past-year inhalant abuse dropped from 10 percent to 7 percent, yet only 64 percent of teens strongly agree that “sniffing or huffing things to get high can kill you,” significantly less than the 70 percent of teens who said the same in 2008.
- Past-year alcohol use is holding steady at 56 percent and past month is at 38 percent.
- Past-year methamphetamine use is holding at 4 percent.
- Past-year cocaine/crack use is at 7 percent.
- Past-year use of Ecstasy is up 50 percent since 2008 (from 6 percent in 2008 to 9 percent in 2011).