



MOST US TEENS ARE ABSTAINING FROM DRINKING, SMOKING AND MARIJUANA, SURVEY SAYS - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Teen drug use hasn't rebounded from its drop during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the results from a large annual national survey released Tuesday.

About two-thirds of 12th graders this year said they hadn't used alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes or e-cigarettes in the previous 30 days. That's the largest proportion abstaining since the annual survey started measuring abstinence in 2017.

Among 10th graders, 80% said they hadn't used any of those substances recently, another record. Among 8th graders, 90% didn't use any of them, the same as was reported in the previous survey.

The only significant increase occurred in [nicotine pouches](#). About 6% of 12th graders saying they'd used them in the previous year, up from about 3% in 2023.

Whether that has the makings of a new public health problem is unclear. The University of Michigan's Richard Miech, who leads the survey, said: "It's hard to know if we're seeing the start of something, or not."

The federally funded Monitoring the Future survey has been operating since 1975. This year's [findings](#) are based on responses from about 24,000 students in grades 8, 10 and 12 in schools across the country. The survey is "one of the best, if not the best" source of national data for substance use by teens, said Noah Kreski, a Columbia University researcher who has studied teen drug use.

Early in the pandemic, students across the country were told not to go to schools and to avoid parties or other gatherings. They were at home, under parents' supervision. Alcohol and drug use of all kinds dropped because experimentation tends to occur with friends, spurred by peer pressure, experts say.

As lockdowns ended, "I think everyone expected at least a partial rebound," Miech said.

Even before the pandemic, there were longstanding declines in teen cigarette smoking, drinking and use of several types of drugs. Experts theorized that kids were staying home and communicating on smartphones rather than hanging out in groups, where they sometimes tried illicit substances.

But marijuana use wasn't falling before the pandemic. And vaping was on [the upswing](#). It was only during the pandemic that those two saw enduring declines, too.



Some experts wonder if the pandemic lockdowns had a deeper influence.

Miech noted that a lot of teens who experiment with e-cigarettes or drugs start in the 9th grade, sometimes because older adolescents are doing it. But the kids who were 9th graders during the lockdowns never picked up the habit, and never had the opportunity to turn into negative influencers of their younger classmates, he said.

"The pandemic stopped the cycle of new kids coming in and being recruited to drug use," Miech said.

Mental health may also be a factor. There were increased [reports](#) of depression and anxiety in kids after the pandemic began. Depression is often associated with substance use, but some people with depression and anxiety are very wary of messing with drugs, said Dr. Duncan Clark, a University of Pittsburgh psychiatrist who researches substance use in kids.

"Some teens with anxiety are worried about the effects of substances. They may also be socially inhibited and have less opportunity to use drugs," Clark said. "It's a complicated relationship."