



Teenage Drug and Alcohol Use

Teens who use drugs and alcohol at an early age are more likely to develop substance dependence or abuse problems later in life. So it has been a goal of the Federal government for many years to prevent or delay substance use among adolescents. The good news is that in 2007, the Healthy People 2010 Database indicated that 79% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 did not use alcohol or illicit drugs in the 30 days prior to the survey. The bad news is that of the 2.9 million people who reported using an illicit drug for the first time in 2008, 56.7% were under 18. Most (84.6%) of the first time alcohol users (4.5 million) in 2008 were under the age of 21.

Table 1. Mean Age for Initial Use of Selected Drugs

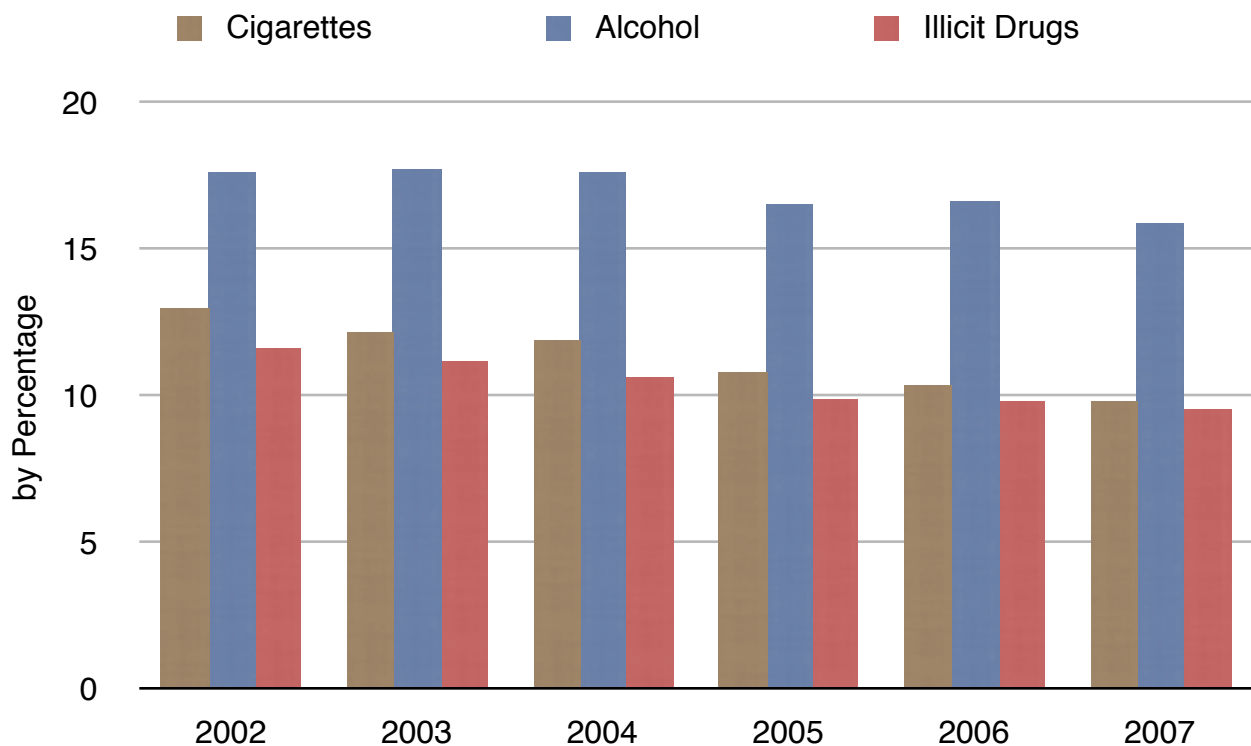
Drug	Age of First Use	Drug	Age of First Use
Alcohol	15.9	Ecstasy	20.3
PCP	15.8	Pain Relievers	21.2
Inhalants	15.9	Heroin	23.4
Marijuana	17.8	Stimulants	21.3
LSD	18.4	Sedatives	21.6
Cocaine	19.8	Tranquilizers	24.4

data from the "2008 National Survey on Drug Use & Health"

Among those who first used alcohol under the age of 21, the mean age of first use in 2008 was 15.9 years, similar to the 2007 estimate of 15.8 years. See Table 1 above for data on the age of first use of selected drugs. As data in the table indicates, drugs such as alcohol, PCP, inhalants, marijuana and LSD were first used during the teen years. “Adult” initiated drugs included: cocaine, ecstasy, pain relievers, heroin, stimulants, sedatives and tranquilizers.

There has been a gradual decline in the use of cigarettes, drugs and alcohol among adolescents from 2002 through 2007. In 2002, thirteen percent of teens reported smoking cigarettes in the previous month; 9.8% in 2007. There were 17.6% of adolescents who admitted to drinking alcohol in the past month in 2002; 15.9% in 2007. And 11.6% said they had used illicit drugs in the past month in 2002; 9.5% in 2007. See Figure 1 for the comparisons.

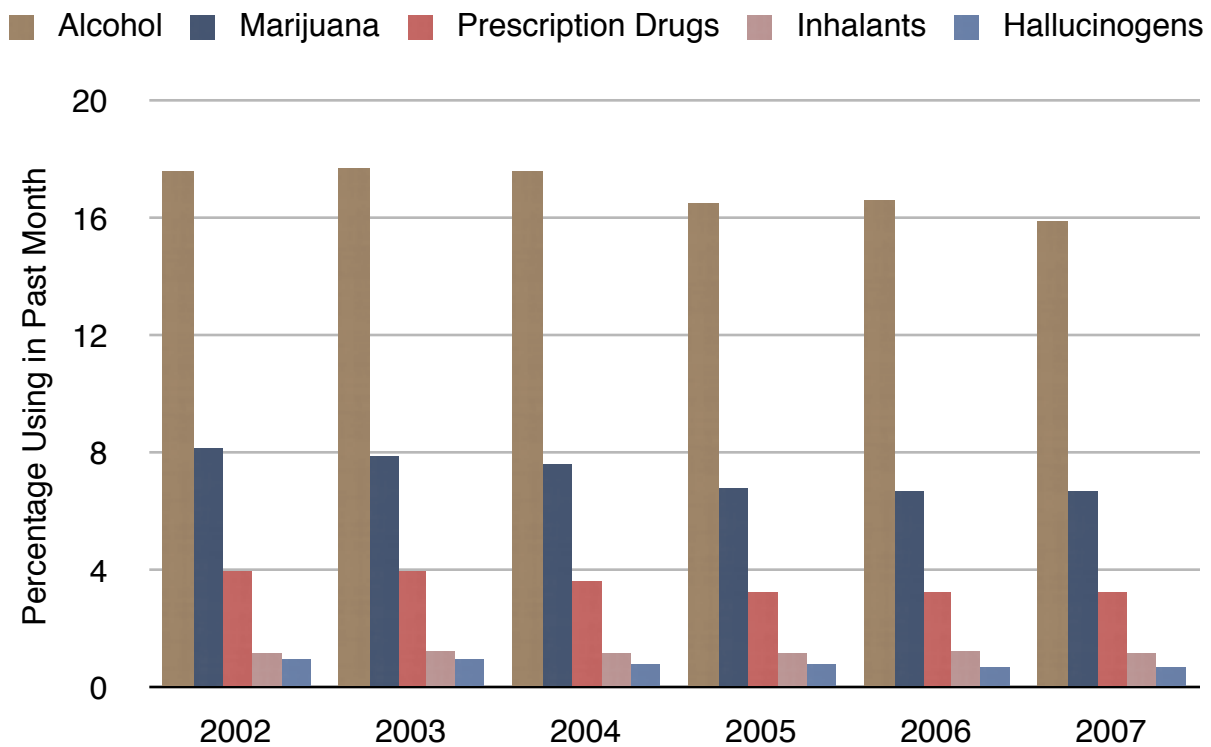
Figure 1
Adolescents Using Cigarettes, Alcohol or Illicit Drugs in the Past Month



data from “Trends in Substance Use, Dependence or Abuse and Treatment Among Adolescents”

The downward trend for illicit drug use among adolescents was primarily the result of lowered percentages of marijuana users, the illicit drug most commonly used among adolescents and adults. The second and third most commonly used illicit drugs among adolescents were prescription drugs and inhalants. Use of inhalants remained stable, while the use of prescription drugs declined from 4.0 to 3.3 percent from 2002 through 2007. In 2007, 9.5% of teens between the ages of 12 and 17 used illicit drugs in the past month; 6.7% used marijuana; 3.3% used prescription drugs; 1.2% used inhalants; and .7% used hallucinogens. But alcohol remains the most popular mind altering chemical among teens by far; used by 15.9% in the month prior to the survey. See Figure 2 for comparisons.

Figure 2
Adolescents Using Illicit Drugs and Alcohol in the Past Month

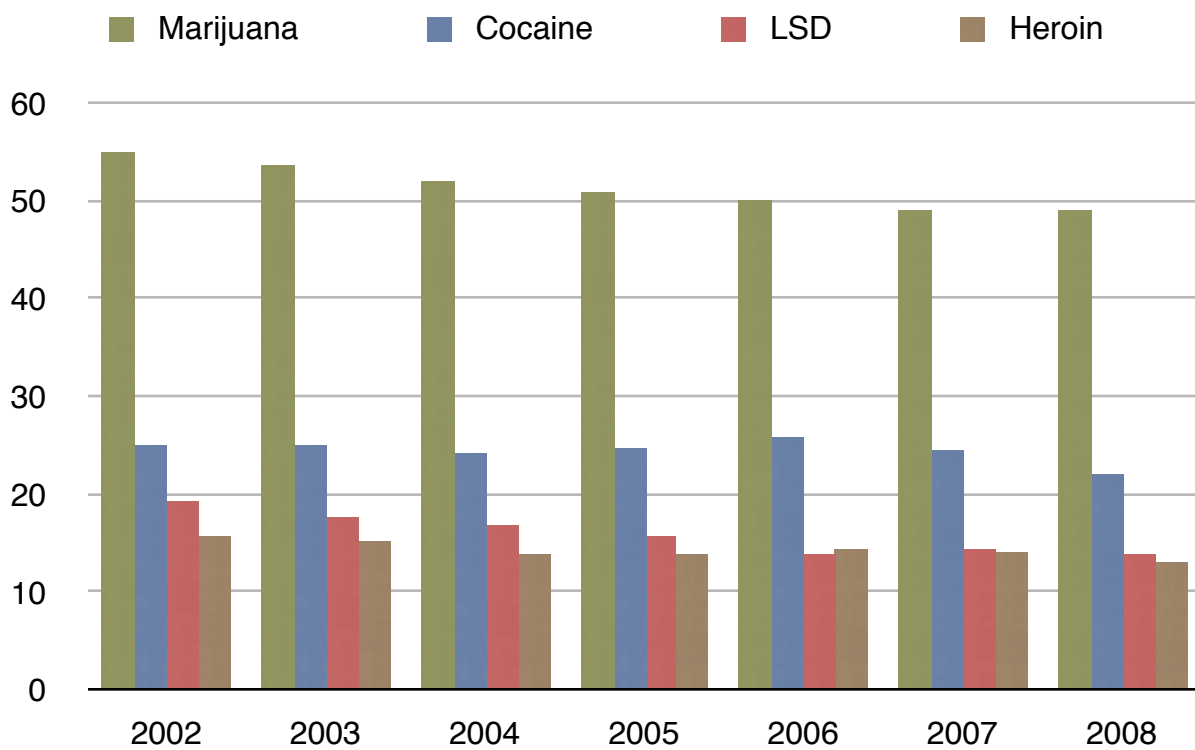


data from "Trends in Substance Use, Dependence or Abuse and Treatment Among Adolescents"

In 2008, 13.7% of teens said they had been approached by someone selling drugs in the past month. This was down from the 16.7% reported in 2002. About half (49.2%) of teens reported that it would be "fairly easy" or "easy" for them to obtain marijuana

if they wanted some. One in seven (13.0%) said that heroin would be “fairly” or “very” easily available, and 13.8% reported the same for LSD. See Figure 3 below for comparisons. The percentage of youths who reported that illicit drugs would be easy to obtain increased with age. For example, 20.5% of those aged 12 or 13 said it would be fairly or very easy to obtain marijuana compared with 52.2% of those aged 14 or 15 and 71.0 % of those aged 16 or 17.

Figure 3
Perceived Availability of Selected Illicit Drugs



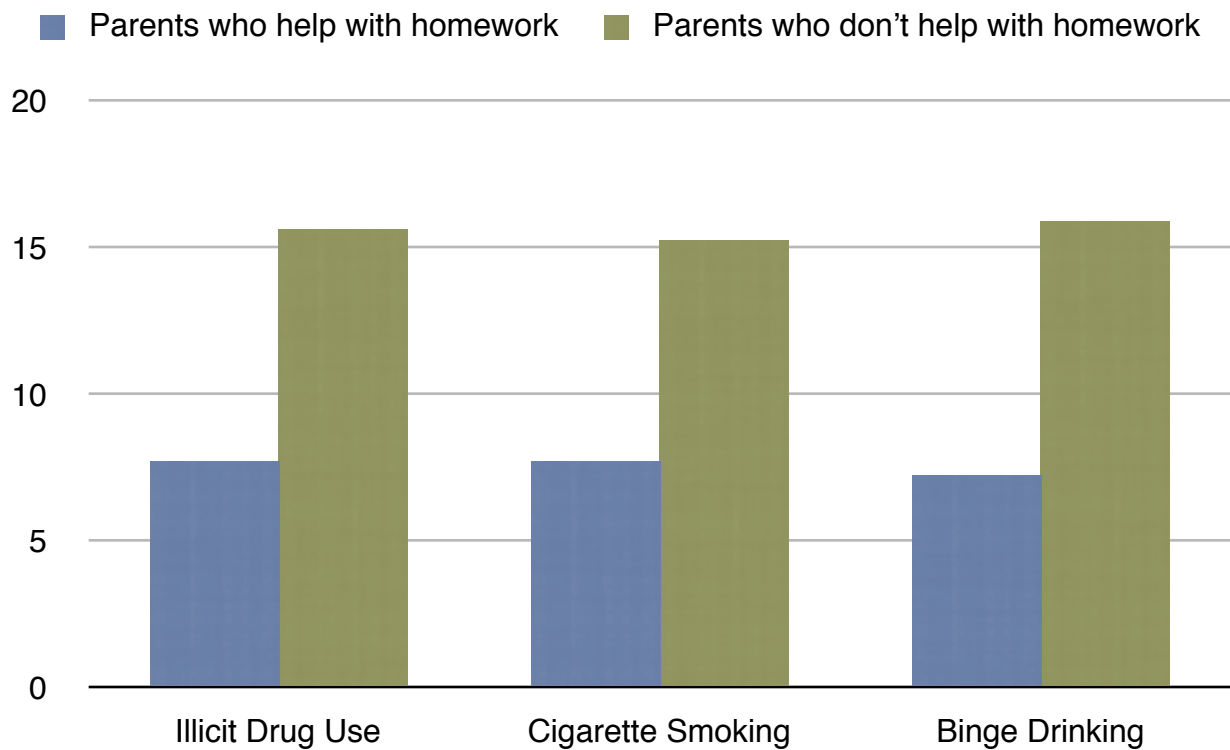
data from the “2008 National Survey on Drug Use & Health”

Most teens believed their parents would “strongly disapprove” of their using illicit drugs or alcohol. In 2008, 90.8% reported that their parents would strongly disapprove of their trying marijuana or hashish once or twice; this was similar to the rate in 2007 (91.0%), but was higher than the rate in 2002 (89.1%). Most (89.7%) also reported that their parents would strongly disapprove of their having one or two drinks of an alcoholic beverage nearly every day, which was the same as the rate in 2007 and similar to the 89.0% reported in 2002. And 92.4% of teens reported that their parents

would strongly disapprove of their smoking one or more packs of cigarettes per day, which was similar to the 92.1% reported in 2007, but higher than the 89.5% reported in 2002.

Parents who monitor the behavior of their teens and are involved in their daily lives can have a significant impact on teen drug use. In 2008, past month use of illicit drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol (including binge alcohol) was lower among teens who reported that their parents always or sometimes engaged in monitoring behaviors than among teens whose parents “seldom” or “never” engaged in such behaviors. For example, the rate of past month use of any illicit drug was 7.7% for teens whose parents always or sometimes helped with homework compared with 15.6% among adolescents who indicated that their parents seldom or never helped. Rates for current cigarette smoking were 7.7 and 15.3% for the two groups of youths, respectively, and rates of past month binge alcohol use were 7.3 versus 15.9% correspondingly. See Figure 4.

Figure 4
Impact of Parental Involvement on Teens Use of Drugs, Alcohol and Cigarettes

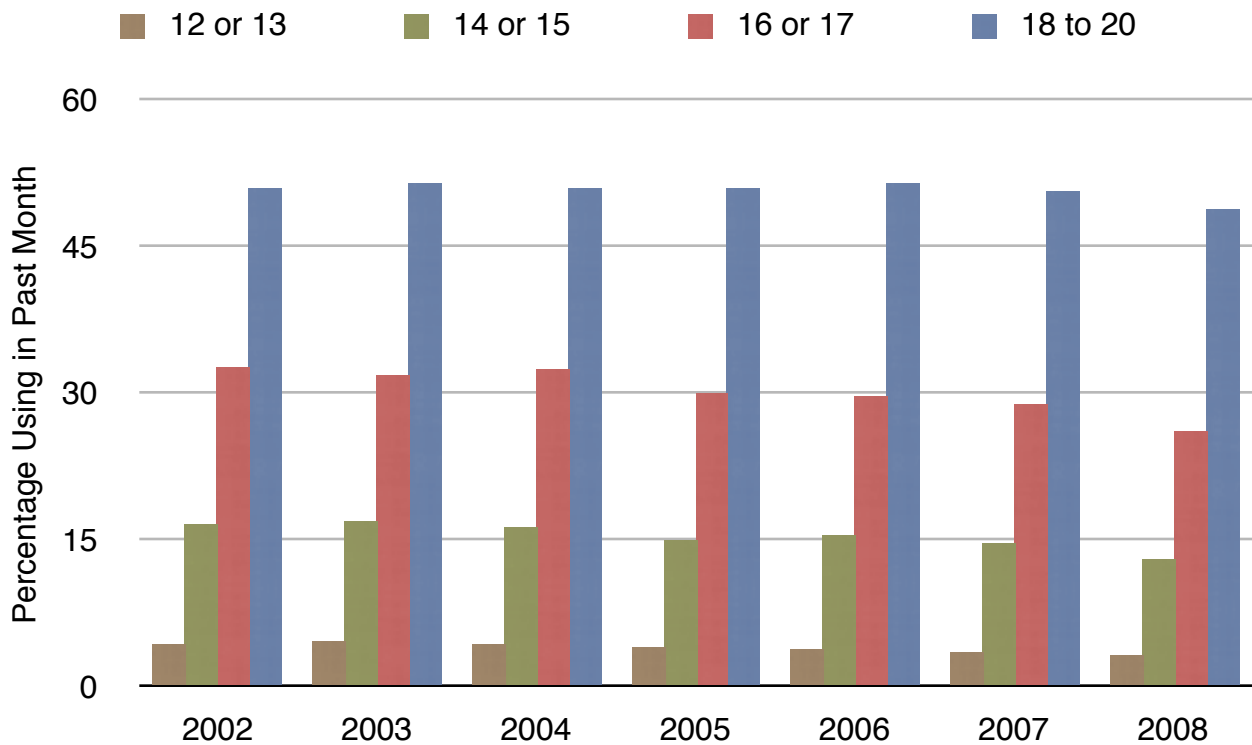


data from the “2008 National Survey on Drug Use & Health”

Alcohol Use Among Teens

About 10.1 million persons between the ages of 12 and 20 (26.4% of this age group) reported drinking alcohol in the past month. Rates of current alcohol use increased with age, as seen in Figure 5 below. In 2008, 3.4% of 12 or 13 year olds said they drank in the past month; 13.1% of 14 or 15 year olds; 26.2% of 16 or 17 year olds; and 48.7% of 18 to 20 year olds. This pattern has remained stable since 2002.

Figure 5
Current Alcohol Use among 12 to 20 Year Olds



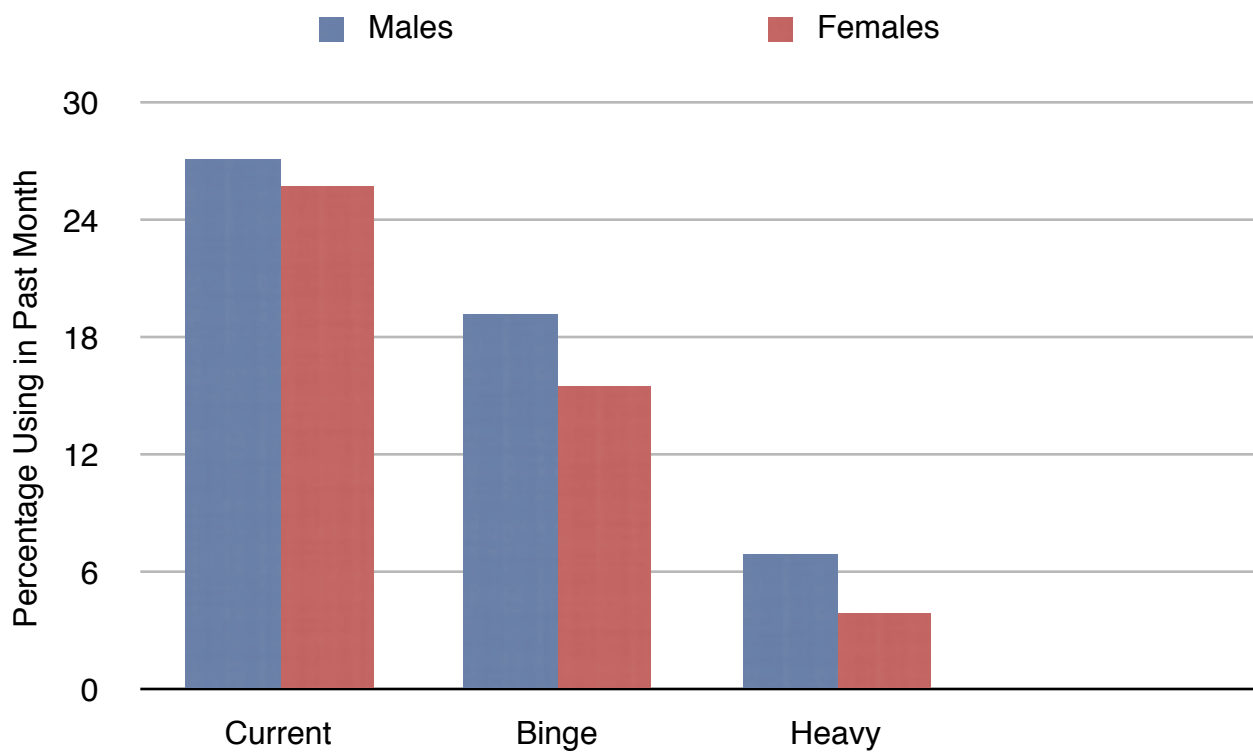
data from the "2008 National Survey on Drug Use & Health"

In the following data, a “drink” is defined as a can or bottle of beer, a glass of wine or a wine cooler, a shot of liquor, or a mixed drink with liquor in it. Times when the respondent only had a sip or two from a drink are not considered to be consumption. Estimates for the prevalence of alcohol use are reported primarily at three levels defined for both males and females and for all ages as follows:

- **Current (past month) use** - At least one drink in the past 30 days.
- **Binge use** - Five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.
- **Heavy use** - Five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days.

Approximately 6.6 million of persons between the ages of 12 and 20 (17.4%) who drank in the past month were binge drinkers; and 2.1% (5.5%) were heavy drinkers. The rates for current and binge drinkers were lower than they were in 2007, where they were 27.9 and 18.6%, respectively. Rates of current, binge and heavy alcohol use among underage persons declines between 2002 and 2008. Current use dropped from 28.8 to 26.4%; binge use declined from 19.3 to 17.4%; and heavy use declined from 6.2 to 5.5%.

Figure 6
Current, Binge and Heavy Alcohol Use among Teens



data from the "2008 National Survey on Drug Use & Health"

There were clear gender differences as well; males tended to drink more often at all three levels of alcohol use than females. Current, binge and heavy alcohol use for males was 27.1%, 19.2% and 7.0% respectively. Current, binge and heavy alcohol use for females was 25.8%, 15.5% and 4.0% respectively. See Figure 6 above for comparisons.

Some interesting demographic patterns emerged within underage drinkers. In 2008, among persons aged 12 to 20, binge drinking was reported by 20.8% of whites, 15.1% of Hispanics and 15.0% of persons reporting two or more races, but only 9.4% of Asians and 9.3% of blacks. Across geographic regions, underage drinking rates were higher in the northeast (30.0%) than in the Midwest (27.1%), and both rates were higher than in the South (24.7%). The rate in the West (25.8%) was similar to the rates in the South and Midwest. Current underage drinking rates were higher in small metropolitan areas (27.9%) compared with large metropolitan areas (25.9%) and similar in large metropolitan areas and nonmetropolitan areas (25.3%).

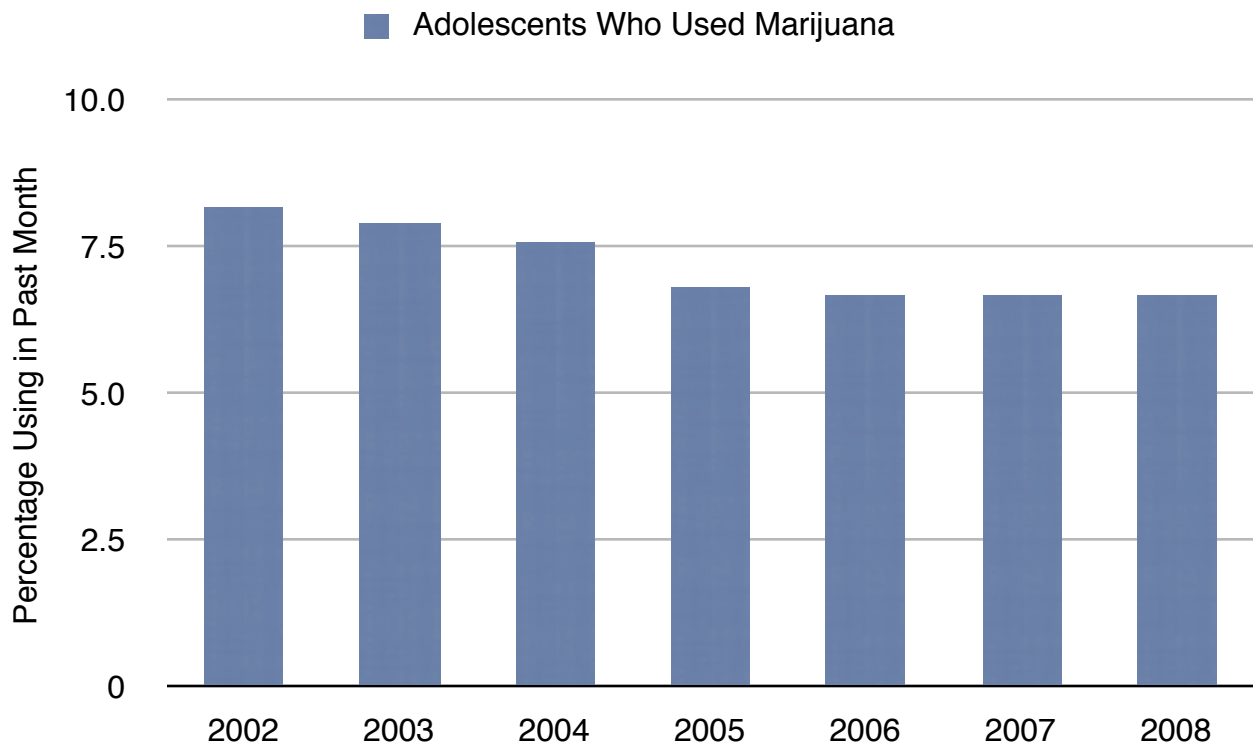
There were also some interesting social patterns to note. In 2008, 81.7% of teen drinkers were with two or more other people the last time they drank alcohol; 13.6% were with one other person the last time they drank, and 4.7% were alone. Teen drinkers were more likely to drink in someone else's home (56.2%) or their own home (29.6%). Females were more likely than males to have been in a restaurant, bar or club when they last drank (10.3% vs 7.0%). Males were more likely than females to have been at a concert or sports game on their last drinking occasion (2.5 vs 1.1%).

Among underage drinkers in 2008, 30.8% paid for their own alcohol; 8.3% purchased it themselves and 22.3% gave money to someone else to purchase it. The most common source for alcohol among underage drinkers who did not pay for alcohol the last time they drank was an unrelated person over 21 (37.4%). Parents, guardians or other adult family members provided alcohol 21.0% of the time; other underage persons did so 21.1% of the time. Other sources of alcohol reported by underaged users included: (a) took the alcohol from home (5.8%), (b) took it from someone else's home (3.2%), and (c) got it some other way (6.9%).

Underage drinkers were more likely than persons aged 21 or over to use illicit drugs within 2 hours of the last time they drank (17.4% vs. 4.6% respectively). By far, the most commonly reported illicit drug used by underage drinkers was marijuana, with 16.5% (1.6 million persons) of the above 16.3% of underage drinkers reporting they did so.

Reported use of marijuana among adolescents in the past month decreased between 2002 (8.2%) and 2005 (6.8%), but remained steady between 2005 and 2008. See Figure 7 for comparisons.

Figure 7
Current Marijuana Use Among Teens



data from the "2008 National Survey on Drug Use & Health"

There were gender and age differences with adolescents who used marijuana in the past month. Males were more likely than females to have used marijuana (7.3% versus 6.0% respectively). And the percentage of adolescents who reported using marijuana increased with age. Sixteen and seventeen year olds were more likely to have used marijuana than either 12 to 13 year olds or 14 to 15 year olds. An interesting relationship was how the perceived risk from smoking marijuana decreased with age; a reverse correlation to the increased use of marijuana with age. See Table 2 for the data.

Table 2
Percentages of Past Month Marijuana Use and Perceptions of Great Risk
from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month

Gender/Age	Past Month Use	Perceived Great Risk Smoking Marijuana
Total	6.7	34.5
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	7.5	32.4
Female	5.8	36.7
<i>Age Group in Years</i>		
12 or 13	0.9	42.1
14 or 15	5.7	35.1
16 or 17	13.1	26.9

data from “Marijuana Use and Perceived Risk of Use Among Adolescents”

The perception of risk from smoking marijuana also influenced the decision to smoke marijuana or not; and this trend held across gender and age. Adolescents who saw a great risk in smoking marijuana were less likely to report using marijuana in the past month than those who saw no risk or only a moderate risk. Only 1.4% of teens who saw a great danger in using marijuana reported using it in the past month, while 9.5% who saw no risk or only a moderate risk used it in the past month. See Table 3 for the comparisons.

Table 3
Percentages of Past Month Marijuana Use by Perceptions of Risk

Gender/Age	Perceived Great Risk	Perceived Moderate to No Risk
Total	1.4	9.5
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	1.6	10.4
Female	1.3	8.5
<i>Age Group in Years</i>		
12 or 13	0.3	1.4
14 or 15	1.3	8.1
16 or 17	3.3	16.7

data from “Marijuana Use and Perceived Risk of Use Among Adolescents”

The above data and discussion was taken from the following sources. Click on the links to review the original report and surveys.

[2008 National Survey on Drug Use & Health](#)

[Marijuana Use and Perceived Risk of Use Among Adolescents](#)

[Healthy People 2010 Database](#)

[Trends in Substance Use, Dependence or Abuse, and Treatment Among Adolescents](#)