



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

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Survey results highlight improvement and areas to address for Rhode Island youth

(Dec. 3, 2024) — The number of high school students reporting marijuana use during the past 30 days dropped from 14.9 percent to 10.9 percent, and the number reporting the use of electronic nicotine devices during the past 30 days dropped from 12.9 percent to 7.1 percent, according to the latest Rhode Island Student Survey.

Expressed in round numbers, that means the number of high school students reporting past 30-day use of marijuana declined from approximately one out of seven to one out of nine, and the number reporting past 30-day use of electronic nicotine devices declined from approximately one out of eight to one out of 14.

Other positive trends from the latest biennial survey include a reduction in the percentage of high school students reporting past 30-day use of alcohol (down from 14.5 percent to 10.0 percent), as well as reductions in the percentage of high school students reporting past 30-day use of cigarettes, and past 30-day use of sedatives or tranquilizers.

In addition:

- Fewer high school students said they had been passengers in vehicles driving by someone under the influence of marijuana or alcohol; and,
- More high school students believed their peers would disapprove of using substances such as marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, or prescription drugs intended for others.

“We cannot overstate the importance of reaching young people with a message of prevention, and these numbers show that our prevention efforts are working,” said Richard Leclerc, Director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals. “At the same time, we know that improvement with any of these numbers does not mean victory, and we must work to maintain the positive trends while we also address numbers that are not going in the right direction.”

One area to address based on the latest results is substance use among middle school students. While fewer middle school students reported past 30-day use of alcohol and electronic nicotine devices, larger percentages reported past 30-day use of other substances, including cigarettes, prescription drugs intended for others, and marijuana. The largest increase was with marijuana, with 7.8 percent reporting use during the past 30 days, up from 5.4 percent in 2022.

The results also showed a reduced perception of risk among high school students for the use of “any illegal drugs” and for prescription drugs intended for others, though larger percentages indicated a negative view of using electronic nicotine devices, drinking alcohol, and using marijuana once or twice a week.

Other areas to address: larger percentages of middle school students said they had perpetrated or experienced bullying during the past three months, and larger percentages said they had spread rumors or lies about other students or made fun of other students.

Administered every other year, the Rhode Island Student Survey asks middle and high school students about a host of topics, including substance use, bullying, depression, violence, and thoughts of suicide. The goal is to identify areas of need, as well as successful prevention efforts that can be built upon.

“We know, from a big-picture perspective, what the challenges facing our youth are, but the survey helps us to focus our efforts as we work with our regional prevention coalitions and others to address any needs they see on the front line,” said Thomas Martin, Director of BHDDH’s Division of Behavioral Health. “The results also help us to align our message of prevention with current trends and respond in a way that will help.”

Other areas showing improvement in the latest results included fewer middle and high school students saying they felt sad or hopeless during the past 30 days about the future, and fewer middle and high school students saying they had ever considered attempting suicide.

Several areas that showed improvement are part of a longer-term six-year trend. This includes the reductions in high school students reporting past 30-day use of marijuana, alcohol or electronic nicotine devices; as well as a reduction in high school students believing it would be easy to obtain electronic nicotine devices, marijuana, alcohol, and illegal drugs.

The latest survey was taken from February to June by more than 23,000 middle and high school students, with 29 school districts participating.

The survey results can be viewed [here](#). Additional data on youth and young adult substance use and behavioral health-related trends can be found on the Rhode Island State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup website [here](#).

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