



2003 Brant,  
Haldimand, Norfolk

# Student Health Survey

Focus on Alcohol, Cannabis and Other Drug Use

## methods

The Student Health Survey was administered to students within the Grand Erie District School Board and the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board in the fall of 2003. The survey is a collaborative project between the Brant County Health Unit and the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit. In order to make the results generalizable, schools were selected in a representative manner and a large sample of students were included. The survey was completed by 2317 students in Grades 5, 7, 9 & 11 (approximately 20%). All classes of a particular grade were surveyed in selected schools. The survey dealt with 11 health related topics. This report focuses on patterns of alcohol, cannabis and other drug use.



## introduction

The use of alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs can be harmful to youth. At a time when the mind and body are developing, these substances can impede the natural process and have a negative impact on the person's health.<sup>1</sup> This report presents the extent of drug use among youth enrolled in the public and separate school boards throughout Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties.

## fast facts

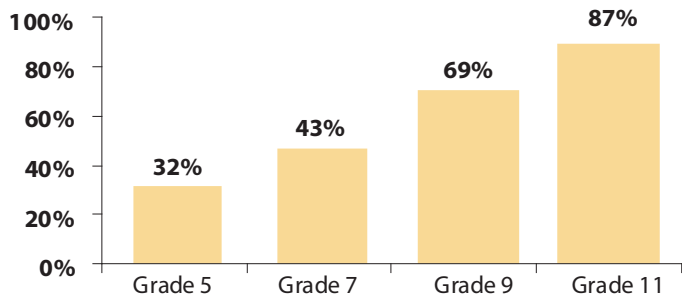
- 38% of students in Grades 5 and 7 drank alcohol in the past 12 months.
- 41% of students in Grades 9 and 11 drank alcohol in the past 4 weeks, out of which nearly 29% drank on a weekly basis.
- 40% of alcohol users in Grade 11 reported binge drinking during the past 4 weeks (i.e., drinking 5 or more drinks on one occasion).
- The proportion of students using cannabis at least once in their lifetime doubled between Grade 9 (26%) and Grade 11 (52%).
- 18% of Grade 11 students used cannabis at least once per week during the past month.
- 13% of students in Grades 7, 9, and 11 had used crack/cocaine, hallucinogens, or a designer drug including ecstasy or speed in their lifetime.
- Psilocybin (magic mushroom), a hallucinogen, was the most commonly used other drug.
- 86% of students who used cannabis in the past 4 weeks also engaged in binge drinking at some point in their lifetime (compared to 25% who had not used cannabis during that time).
- 57% of students who used cannabis in the past 4 weeks also used another illicit drug at some point in their lifetime (compared to 3% who had not used cannabis during that time).
- 68% of students in Grades 7, 9, and 11 reported using either alcohol, cannabis or another illicit drug at least once in their lifetime.

# alcohol

Fifty-seven percent of the students surveyed had tried alcohol in their lifetime. Early onset of first use has typically been considered one of the risk factors for experiencing alcohol problems as an older youth and adult.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of students who drank alcohol in the last 12 months increased with Grade, ranging from 32% in Grade 5 to 87% in Grade 11 (see Graph below).<sup>\*</sup> Using comparison data from the 1999 survey, only Grade 7 showed any notable change (decreasing from 69% in 1999 to 43% in 2003).

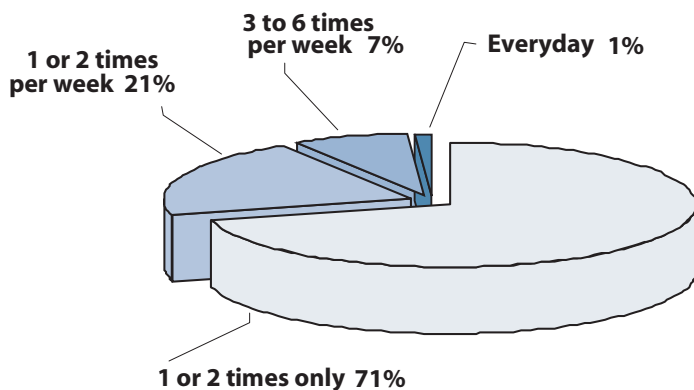
(\*Includes students who 'drank only at special events' and who 'had a sip of alcohol to see what it was like.')

**Percent of Students who Drank Alcohol in the Last 12 Months**



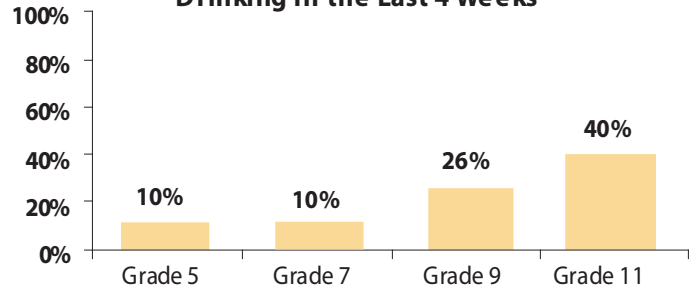
Twenty-three percent of the students surveyed had consumed alcohol within the last four weeks. Students in the higher grades (9 & 11) were more likely to use alcohol over the four weeks prior to being surveyed (41%) than students in Grades 5 and 7 (8%). Among Grade 9 & 11 students who drank in the preceding 4 weeks, 29% reported drinking at least once or twice per week (21% 1-2 times/wk, and 8% more frequently, see Graph below). With increased frequency of alcohol use, comes increased risk for experiencing problems in various life areas including physical and emotional health, relationships, and education/employment. Frequent use may be indicative of underlying issues.<sup>2</sup>

**Patterns of Alcohol Use by Students in Grades 9 & 11 Who Were Users in the Last 4 Weeks**



By Grade 11, 2 out of every 5 students who had used alcohol during their lifetime had also engaged in binge drinking during the last 4 weeks (see Graph below). Binge drinking was defined as having five or more drinks of alcohol on the same occasion.

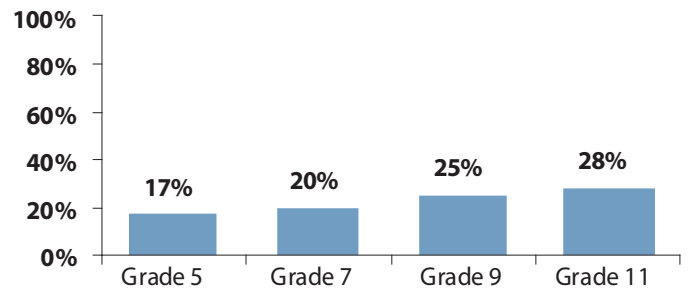
**Percent of Alcohol Users That Were Binge Drinking in the Last 4 Weeks**



Similar findings were observed for a related question on number of times students drank alcohol in the last 4 weeks until it made them feel drunk. Forty percent of alcohol users in Grade 11 and 25% in Grade 9 had been 'drunk' in the last 4 weeks. With increased alcohol use comes increased risk of harm or injury. Binge drinking may lead to unwanted sex, violence, accidents (falls, drowning, burns), motor vehicle collisions, suicidal behaviour, or alcohol poisoning.

Over a 12 month period, 23% of students had ridden in a vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking. The likelihood of students engaging in this risky behaviour increased with grade, but this increase was smaller than seen in the other alcohol questions (see Graph below). A slightly higher percentage of females (26%), compared to males (21%) were more likely to engage in this risky alcohol related behaviour.

**Percent of Students who had Ridden in a Vehicle Driven by Someone Who Had Been Drinking**

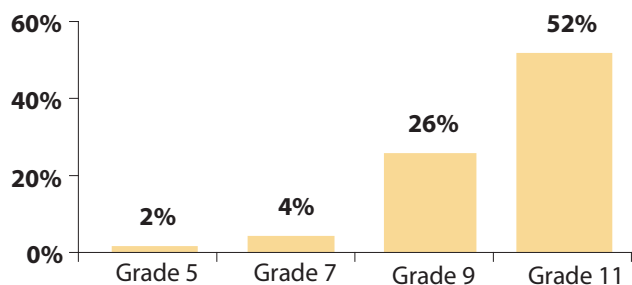


Ontario-wide data show that youth are twice as likely to put themselves at risk by being a passenger in a car with a driver who has been drinking than to get behind the wheel after drinking themselves.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we need to teach all students that riding with a driver who has been drinking is just as dangerous as drinking and driving.

# cannabis

In total, 22% of students surveyed had used cannabis at least once in their lifetime. Prior use increased by Grade (up to 1-in-4 by Grade 9 and 1-in-2 by Grade 11, see Graph below). Forty-two percent of prior users in Grade 11 first tried cannabis in elementary school.

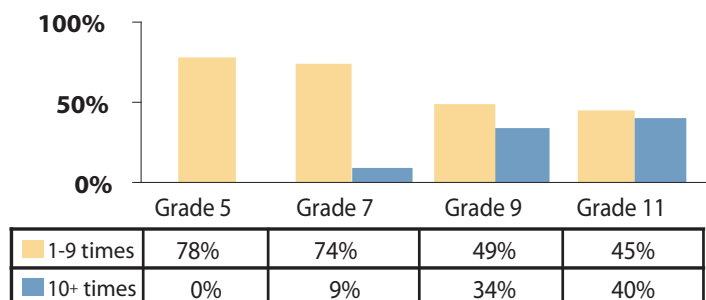
**Percent of Students Using Cannabis At Least Once by Grade**



The perception of risk surrounding cannabis use has weakened fairly significantly across Ontario in recent years. In fact, cannabis use increased throughout the 1990s in Ontario, as risk perception decreased, and since then has remained relatively stable, but still elevated.<sup>4</sup>

Eighteen percent of all students in Grades 5, 7, 9 and 11 used cannabis at least once in the last 12 months, which increased by grade. Of prior users, 36% used cannabis 10+ times in the past year (8% of all students). Between grades 7 and 9, the proportion using cannabis 10+ times increased dramatically, reaching 40% in Grade 11 (20% of all Grade 11 students, see Graph below).

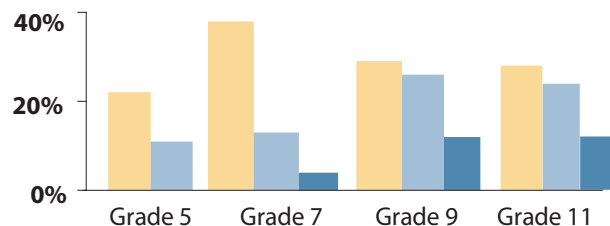
**Past Year Patterns of Cannabis Use Among Prior Users**



Thirty-five percent used cannabis one or more times per week in the past month (8% of all students). Weekly and daily use during the past month increased sharply between Grades 7 and 9 (see next Graph). By Grade 11, 18% of all students used cannabis at least once per week during the past month.



**Past Month Patterns of Cannabis Use Among Prior Users**



Frequency	Grade 5	Grade 7	Grade 9	Grade 11
1-2 times	22%	38%	29%	28%
Weekly	11%	13%	26%	24%
Daily	0%	4%	12%	12%

Overall, there was a drop in past year usage and frequency of use between 1999 and 2003, in Grades 7, 9, and 11. Past year use was also lower than among Ontario students in these grades.<sup>4</sup> In all grades, males used cannabis more frequently than females (of users, 43% vs. 25% used it weekly in the past month).

Cannabis use has both short and long term adverse effects. Impairment of motor skills, coordination and judgement occur, which contribute to greater likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour such as driving under the influence. In Ontario, 20% of drivers in grades 10-12 reported driving within one hour of using cannabis.<sup>4</sup>

Cannabis users are also more likely than non-users to experiment with other drugs, have difficulty at work or school, have poor relationships and may be involved in the criminal justice system.<sup>5,6</sup> Over the long term, cannabis use can cause brain and lung damage, physical and/or psychological dependence, a weakened immune system and low motivation.<sup>3</sup>

## other drugs

(Grades 7, 9 & 11 only)

In total, 13% of students in Grades 7, 9, and 11 indicated that they had used at least one of the following other drugs in their lifetime:

- Crack/Cocaine
- Hallucinogens: LSD or Psilocybin
- Designers: Ecstasy, Ketamine, GHB, Speed

Of the students using one or more of these other drugs, over 75% indicated the use of psilocybin (magic mushroom), 38% crack/cocaine, and 33% ecstasy. Use of these other drugs increased with grade (2% Grade 7, 13% Grade 9, 23% Grade 11). By Grade 11, 20% had used a hallucinogen, 13% had used a designer drug, and 8% had used crack/cocaine.



# resources

For information or assistance

## In Haldimand and Norfolk Counties' contact:

Addiction Services,

Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit

Simcoe

(519) 428 - 1805

Caledonia

(905) 318 - 5367 ext. 317

Dunnville

(905) 774 - 3333 ext. 221

## In Brantford and Brant County:

Brant County Health Unit

(519) 753-4937 ext. 259

Addictions Services,

St. Leonard's Community Services

(519) 754 - 0253

## For more information on the web:

Brant County Health Unit

[www.bchu.org](http://www.bchu.org)

Haldimand Norfolk Health Unit

[www.haldimand-norfolk.org/health](http://www.haldimand-norfolk.org/health)

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

[www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

[www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)

**Special Note:** Addiction Counsellors are available in all secondary schools in Haldimand, Norfolk and Brant Counties. Please contact student services for more information.

# references

- 1 Paglia, A., & Room, R. (1999). Preventing substance use problems among youth: A literature review and recommendations. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 20 (1), 3-50.
- 2 Health Canada 2001, Preventing Substance Use Problems Among Young People, A Compendium of Best Practices
- 3 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 1998 Drugs and Drug Abuse
- 4 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2003 Ontario Student Drug Use Report, 2003
- 5 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, First Contact Program
- 6 Health Canada 2001, Best Practices for Youth, Substance Abuse Problems

# increased risks

Among Grade 7, 9, and 11 students surveyed, 68% had used either alcohol, cannabis, or one of the other drugs listed at least once in their lifetime. Overall, 60% of students used alcohol or cannabis at least once in the past 12 months. Among prior users of cannabis, 94% also drank alcohol (vs. 47% overall). Moreover, among users of cannabis in the past 4 weeks, 36% drank at least once per week (vs. 3% among non users of cannabis in the past 4 weeks) and 86% had engaged in binge drinking during their lifetime (vs. 25% of those who did not use cannabis in the past 4 weeks). A clear relationship was found between cannabis and other drug use too. Overall, 57% of students who used cannabis in the past four weeks also used one of the other drugs listed in their lifetime, compared to 3% who had not used cannabis.

# conclusions

The results of the local youth survey demonstrate a need for prevention programs related to substance use that target our youth at an earlier age. A collaborative effort between Public Health, schools, community organizations, parents, and youth themselves will likely help to increase the effectiveness of these programs. Health Canada recommends that effective programs focus not only on reducing risk factors but also on increasing resiliency and building protective factors.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, our prevention programs will be designed so that they are comprehensive in nature, addressing not only drug and alcohol use specifically, but encompassing a holistic approach to the well-being of our children.



# contacts

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