

Urban and Rural Student Substance Use

Key Findings

The analysis of results from several Canadian surveys suggest that students who attend schools in rural areas, when compared to their urban peers are more likely to:

- Drink alcohol;
- Have five or more drinks on a single occasion (binge drink);
- Drive after drinking alcohol; and
- Drive after using cannabis.

These findings suggest that rural students are at an increased risk of participating in alcohol- and cannabis-related risky behaviours such as impaired driving and binge drinking. This finding indicates a need to tailor prevention initiatives according to geographic setting.

While urban students were no more likely than rural students to report substance use and associated risk behaviours, the report validates the need for continued investment in evidence-informed substance use prevention for all youth. Efforts to prevent substance abuse and promote student well-being contribute directly to academic success. Effective substance abuse prevention efforts are critical to ensuring the healthy development and success of youth.

Why Does This Matter?

Substance use by youth in Canada is an important health issue. According to the 2013 Canadian, Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey, youth 15 to 24 years old have the highest self-reported past-year use of illicit substances compared to other Canadians and are four times more likely than adults aged 25 years and older to report harm because of drug use.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund Office of Research (2013), Canadian students aged 15 years had the highest rate of past-year cannabis use (28%) in 2009–2010 when compared to students in other developed countries.

Because adolescents' brains are undergoing rapid and extensive development that can be affected by drug use, using drugs and alcohol during adolescence can lead to problems in adulthood, including chronic disease, addiction and mental health disorders.

The evidence in this report was sought in order to provide a cross-Canada picture that could inform communities of the differences in student drug use and identify how youth drug prevention workers could focus and tailor their efforts.



What Did We Do?

The Student Drug Use Surveys (SDUS) Working Group consists of representatives of regularly occurring, provincial or national student surveys. The Working Group and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) identified the need to address a gap in knowledge about the differences in substance use between urban and rural students.

CCSA, in collaboration with the SDUS Working Group, analyzed student use of alcohol, cannabis, illicit drugs and prescription drugs, as well as their use of alcohol or cannabis before driving. For the purposes of this analysis, students who participated in the surveys were identified as rural or urban according to the postal codes of their schools. Results took into account the sex, grade level (grades 7 to 12) or age, social background and family income of students.

What Did We Find?

Students who attend rural schools are more likely to report the use of alcohol, binge drink, and drive after drinking or using cannabis. The results for cannabis and other illicit drug use was inconsistent across surveys – with less than half of the surveys analyzed for the report indicating that rural students were more likely to report using these substances. None of the eight surveys found that students from urban schools were more likely than rural students to report use of any substance or participation in any of the risky behaviours analyzed for the report.

What Does This Study Mean For You?

The report's findings identify differences between urban and rural students that indicate a need to tailor drug and alcohol prevention programs by geographic location. Schools and school boards, public health, health promotion and drug use prevention organizations, and law enforcement agencies are well-positioned to work with youth in their communities to prevent substance use and related risky behaviours. These findings could have a bearing on the practices of these organizations.

The [Canadian Standards for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention](#) can assist you and your organization as you develop and implement substance use prevention programs. This resource helps schools, communities and family organizations in planning, selecting, implementing and evaluating their prevention efforts.

Where Can You Learn More?

The *Urban and Rural Student Substance Use* report is the newest addition to CCSA's [youth drug prevention resources](#). Its development is part of CCSA's ongoing efforts to inform and support youth drug prevention in Canada. For more information about this research, see the full [technical report](#).

To find out more about how CCSA's [Canadian Standards for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention](#) and [Competencies for the Youth Substance Use Prevention Workforce](#) can help you in your prevention efforts, contact youth-jeunes@ccsa.ca.

ISBN 978-1-77178-297-5

© Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse 2015



Canadian Centre
on Substance Abuse
Centre canadien de lutte
contre les toxicomanies

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse changes lives by bringing people and knowledge together to reduce the harm of alcohol and other drugs on society. We partner with public, private and non-governmental organizations to improve the health and safety of Canadians. CCSA activities and products are made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views of CCSA do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.