



Alberta Health

Table of contents

Introduction.....	3
Tobacco	3
Alcohol.....	4
Cannabis (marijuana or hashish).....	5
Other illicit drugs (excluding cannabis).....	5
Gambling	6
Perceptions of substance use	7
Trends	7
Risk and Protective Factors.....	8
Summary	9

Prepared by Jesse Jahrig, B.A.
Alberta Health Services-Addiction and Mental Health

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Introduction

The Alberta Youth Experience Survey (TAYES) is designed to measure alcohol, tobacco, other drug use and gambling behaviour as well as associated risk and protective factors among Alberta students in Grades 7 to 12. The former Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)¹ conducted the first cycle of the survey in 2002, a second in 2005 and, most recently, a third in 2008. For the 2008 cycle, 3,469 students from across the province were surveyed. This report presents highlights from the 2008 results and includes information on substance use and gambling prevalence, trends and associated risk and protective factors. In general, prevalence rates of substance use and gambling activity decreased from past cycles of TAYES.

Tobacco

Overall, rates of smoking among students in Grades 7 to 12 were low; most students (95.3%) were not current smokers.² Older students were more likely to engage in smoking behaviour than younger students.

- Among all students, 69.7% reported they had never tried smoking tobacco.
- Equal proportions of males and females were non-smokers (95.4% and 95.2% respectively).
- The percentage of all students who had ever smoked a cigarette, even just a few puffs, increased from 10.0% among students in Grade 7 to 47.8% in Grade 12 (see Figure 1).
- When examined by region,³ there was some variation in current smoking rates. Calgary had the lowest rate of current smokers (5.2%), followed by the Central region (5.3%) and the North region (7.0%). Rates were not reportable for the South region or Edmonton.⁴
- Although most Alberta youth do not smoke themselves, approximately 21.0% reported living with a smoker and 28.5% of students had been exposed to second-hand smoke inside a vehicle in the week prior to the survey.

¹ In 2009, Alberta Health Services (AHS) was created from 12 formerly separate health entities in the province including the former Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC). Subsequently all future TAYES reporting will be coordinated by AHS.

² Current smokers are classified as youth who had smoked in the 30 days preceding the survey and had smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime.

³ For more detail on what comprises a region refer to Alberta Health Services-Addiction and Mental Health. (2009). *The Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2008: Technical report*. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Author.

⁴ The results have been suppressed due to a subgroup sample size below 30 or an estimated prevalence below 0.5%.

Alcohol

Although half of students (50.9%) were non-drinkers,⁵ alcohol was the most commonly used substance among students in Grades 7 to 12. The majority of students did not engage in drinking behaviour that would be considered as hazardous or harmful drinking.⁶ However, consumption increased significantly by grade and, among those students who drank, there were high rates of binge drinking.

- 51.9% of students tried alcohol and nearly half (49.1%) of all students indicated that they consumed alcohol in the last 12 months prior to the survey (see Table 1).
- Of all students, a similar proportion of males (47.9%) and females (50.3%) reported consuming alcohol in the year prior to the survey.
- The percentage of lifetime⁷ and current drinkers⁸ increased with grade: 18.1% and 15.0% of Grade 7 students reported drinking in their lifetime and in the past year, respectively. These percentages increased to 77.3% and 75.1% for Grade 12 students (see Figure 1).
- Current drinking was lowest in Edmonton (37.4%) followed by Calgary (45.4%), the South region (47.7%), the North region (59.3%) and the Central region (62.0%).
- Among students who consumed alcohol in the past 12 months, 79.5% reported they engaged in binge drinking.⁹
- Among students who drank, males reported higher rates than females of binge drinking (81.7% and 77.3%, respectively).
- Although students in Grades 7 and 8 were less likely than students in higher grades to drink, when they did drink they were more likely to binge drink.
- Among all students, 86.3% were not hazardous drinkers, according to AUDIT criteria.⁶

⁵ A non-drinker is defined as not having consumed alcohol in the 12 months prior to the survey.

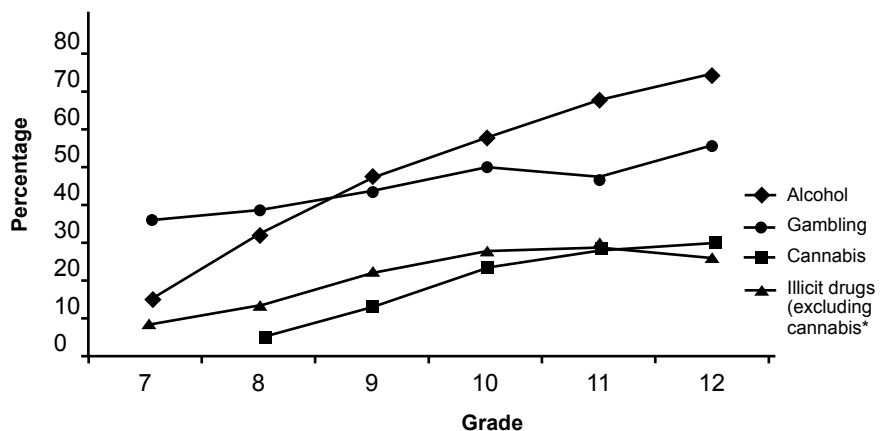
⁶ The WHO (World Health Organization) developed the AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) to identify hazardous or harmful drinking patterns. The 10-question survey scores range from zero to 40, with a score of 40 representing the most hazardous and harmful drinking patterns. For our purposes, a score of eight or higher identifies hazardous or harmful drinking. The AUDIT includes four items regarding adverse consequences, or harm, experienced as a result of alcohol use: feelings of guilt or remorse, memory loss, injury to oneself or others, and concern expressed by a family member, friend, or health-care worker about one's drinking.

⁷ A lifetime drinker is defined as having ever consumed alcohol.

⁸ A current drinker is defined as having drunk in the 12 months prior to the survey.

⁹ Binge drinking refers to consuming five or more drinks on one occasion in the month prior to the survey.

Figure 1. Past-year use of substances and participation in gambling activity by grade



* Illicit drugs refers to both illicit street drugs, excluding cannabis and the use of prescription drugs without a prescription.

Cannabis (marijuana or hashish)

Similar to tobacco use, the majority (83.7%) of students in Grades 7 to 12 reported that they were not currently using cannabis. However, 16.3% of students indicated that they had used cannabis in the past 12 months.

- Males (16.7%) and females (16.0%) were equally likely to report using cannabis within the year preceding the survey.
- Older students were more likely to use cannabis. For instance, 30.3% of Grade 12 students reported current cannabis use,¹⁰ whereas only 4.4% of Grade 8 students were categorized as current users (see Figure 1).
- Past-year cannabis use was lowest in Edmonton (12.3%), followed by the North region (16.6%), the Central region (17.1%) and Calgary (20.1%). Results were not reportable for the South region.¹¹

Other illicit drugs (excluding cannabis)

For the purposes of this report, “illicit drugs” refers to illicit street drugs (e.g., cocaine, MDMA, ecstasy, glue, solvents) and the use of prescription drugs without a prescription (e.g. codeine, tranquilizers, oxycodone, Ritalin®). Illicit drug use does not include cannabis use.¹²

The majority of Alberta students (78.7%) reported they had not used illicit drugs (excluding cannabis) in the 12 months prior to the survey. Despite the fact that most students in Grades 7 to 12 do not use drugs, the TAYES results demonstrate several important findings among students who do use illicit drugs.

- Illicit street drugs that were most frequently used included MDMA or ecstasy (3.7% past-year use) and hallucinogens (4.0% past-year use), which includes mescaline and psilocybin, or magic mushrooms, but excluded LSD or PCP (see Table 1).
- 17.2% of students reported using prescription drugs without a prescription in the 12 months prior to the survey. Codeine was the most frequently used prescription drug, with 15.5% of students having used it in the past 12 months (see Table 1).
- Males (19.1%) and females (23.6%) had similar rates of illicit drug use (excluding cannabis).¹³
- Similar to other substances, there was an increase in the proportion of students who used illicit drugs (excluding cannabis) in the past year as grade increased. This proportion ranged from a low of 8.9% in Grade 7, to a high of 27.4% in Grade 12 (see Figure 1).

¹⁰ Current cannabis use or ‘current cannabis users’ is defined as using cannabis within the 12 months prior to the survey.

¹¹ The results have been suppressed due to a subgroup sample size below 30 or an estimated prevalence below 0.5%.

¹² For more information on illicit drugs refer to Alberta Health Services-Addiction and Mental Health. (2009).

The Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2008: Technical report. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Author.

¹³ This difference was not statistically significant.

- Past-year illicit drug use (excluding cannabis) varied from 14.8% in the South region, 17.7% in Edmonton, 22.1% in Calgary, 23.9% in the North region and to 24.1% in the Central region.

Table 1. Past-year use of alcohol, cannabis and other illicit drugs

Substance	Past-year use (%)
Alcohol	49.1
Cannabis	16.3
Codeine	15.5
MDMA or Ecstasy	3.7
Hallucinogens	4.0
Solvents	2.2
Stimulants	2.3
Cocaine	2.1
Glue	1.2
LSD	1.8
Tranquilizers	1.5
Ritalin®	1.2
Dextromethrophan	1.0
Oxycodone	0.8
Crystal meth	#
Illicit drug use including cannabis	27.9%
Illicit drug use excluding cannabis	21.3%

The findings have been suppressed due to a subgroup sample size below 30 or an estimated prevalence below 0.5%.

Gambling

Over half (54.5%) of students reported that they did not gamble and 45.5% reported that they had gambled at some point in the 12 months prior to the survey. However, most of these students' gambling behaviour was not categorized as problematic (94.5%).¹⁴

- Males (52.1%) were more likely than females (39.1%) to be categorized as current gamblers.¹⁵
- In general, as grade increased so did the rates of current gambling, ranging from 37.1% among students in Grade 7 to 55.9% among students in Grade 12 (see Figure 1).
- Student gambling was highest in the North region (52.3%) followed by the South region (48.1%), the Central region (47.5%), Calgary (45.0%) and Edmonton (38.2%).

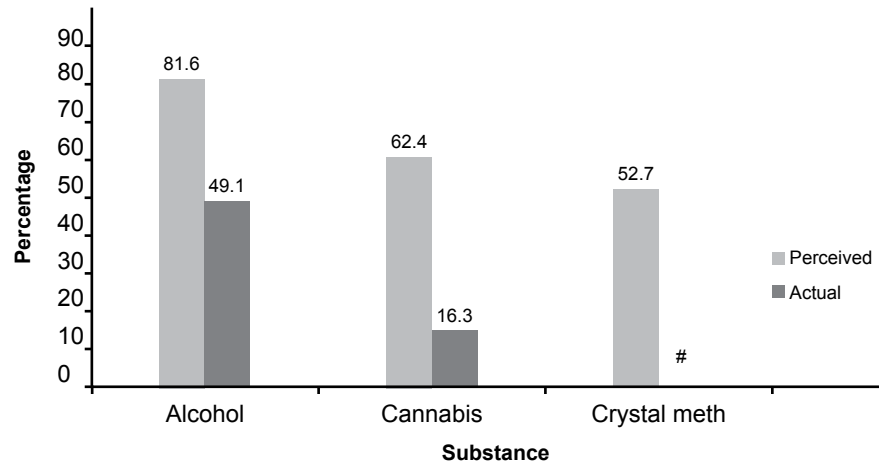
¹⁴ Problem gambling was measured using the South Oaks Gambling Screen-Revised for Adolescents (SOGSRA) is a 12-item questionnaire that measures gambling frequency and associated behaviour, with each item scoring one point to a maximum of 12. A score of zero or one indicates that the respondent does not have a gambling problem, a score of two or three defines the respondent as an at-risk gambler, and a score of 4 or higher denotes problem gambling.

¹⁵ A current gambler is defined as gambling within 12 months prior to the survey.

Perceptions of substance use

Students were asked to estimate the percentage of students in their school who had used tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, or crystal meth over the previous 12 months. In general, findings indicated that students’ perceptions of the prevalence of past-year substance use were higher than actual rates of past-year use (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Perceived past-year use vs. actual past-year use of alcohol, cannabis and crystal meth.

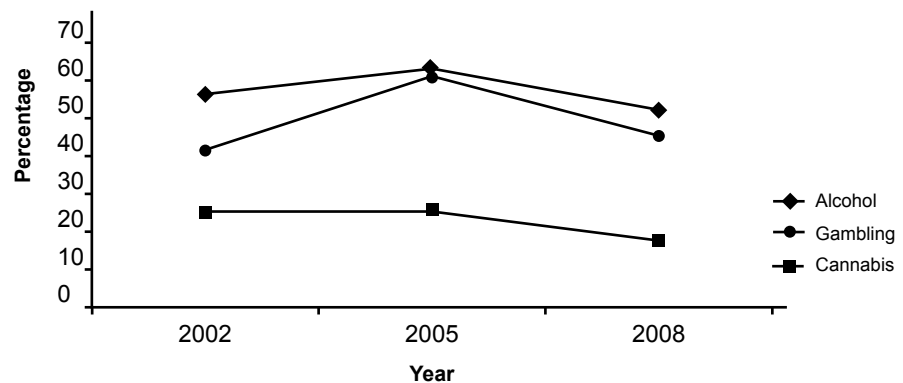


* The results for actual use of crystal meth not been reported due to a subgroup sample size below 30 or an estimated prevalence below 0.5%.

Trends

Figure 3 indicates that, in general, alcohol and cannabis use has decreased from 2002 to 2008 and gambling has slightly increased since 2002. However, it is important to note that the methodology for each cycle varied, in particular for the 2005 cycle.¹⁶

Figure 3. Past-year substance use and gambling prevalence TAYES 2002, 2005, 2008.



Note: Due to changes in TAYES questionnaire, trends could not be reported for tobacco use and illicit drug use.

¹⁶ The TAYES 2005 results must be interpreted with caution, due to limitations in sampling across Alberta. AADAC was unable to attain approval to survey Calgary students and secured access to only a limited group of Edmonton high school students. As a result, the findings may not sufficiently represent Alberta students, overall, and comparisons to the 2002 and 2008 TAYES findings must be made with caution.

Risk and Protective Factors

Risk and protective factors are terms often used to identify aspects of individuals or their environments that make development of a given problem more or less likely (Health Canada, 1999).¹⁷ More specifically, risk factors are defined as either life events or experiences that are statistically associated with an increase in problematic behaviour such as substance use and problem gambling. Protective factors are the life events or experiences that mitigate the effects of risk factors and reduce the likelihood of problematic behaviour. Protective factors increase resiliency, which is the ability to overcome adversity.¹⁸

Risk and protective factors can be categorized into five different domains:

- the individual (e.g., age, gender, health)
- peers (e.g., connections to peers, behaviours of peers)
- family (e.g., substance use and gambling in family, support, parental awareness)
- school (e.g., grades, connections to and feelings about school)
- community (e.g., neighbourhood, social organizations, participation in community)

In the 2008 survey, students in Grades 7 to 12 were asked questions related to these domains. In general, students indicated that they felt good about themselves mentally and physically, they felt connected to their school, and they received support from their family and peers.

- Students rated their physical (88.8%) and mental health (87.8%) as good to excellent.
- Students reported that they felt safe at school (89%), felt close to people in their school (85.3%) and did well at school (84%).
- Most students reported that their parents knew where they were after school (90.6%) and who they were with (87.1%).
- Students reported that their friends encouraged them to do positive things and encouraged their success (78.6%).
- Many students (65.1%) reported being physically active four or more days out of the past seven.

When compared to students who used substances and/or gambled, students who did not use substances and/or gamble had higher ratings of health and community, family and peer connectedness.

¹⁷ Health Canada. (1999). Trends in the health of Canadian youth. Ottawa, ON: Publications, Health Canada.

¹⁸ For more details on risk and protective factors refer to the following document: Alberta Health Services-Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. (2009). *An overview of risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use and gambling behaviour: A review of the literature for The Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2008*. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Author.

- Students who identified as current smokers, current illicit drug users (including cannabis), drinkers and/or gamblers were less likely to agree with statements indicating positive self-esteem.
- In terms of physical exercise or participation in sports activities, the most sedentary group were students who were current smokers with 14.3% indicating no days of physical activity in the past seven days (compared with the total survey average of 7.0% reporting no physical activity in the past week).
- When compared with students who did not use substances or gamble, current illicit drug users (including cannabis) and/or gamblers were less likely to feel integrated into their school and did not feel safe at school. In addition, students who were current drinkers were less likely than non-drinkers to feel like part of their school.
- Students who identified as either current smokers, current illicit drug users (including cannabis), drinkers and/or gamblers were less likely to report having a close relationship with their parents and were less likely to report that their parents show them affection or understand them.

Summary

The findings indicate that most students do not smoke, use cannabis or use other illicit drugs. While many students consume alcohol or engage in gambling activity, their behaviour is not usually harmful or problematic. Furthermore, students reported good to excellent levels of mental and physical health as well as support from school, friends and family.

Alberta Health Services will continue to monitor substance use and gambling behaviour as well as risk and protective factors among Alberta youth. The findings from this survey contribute to the current understanding of substance use and gambling patterns among Alberta's students. These findings are also useful for identifying emerging trends and factors that may influence students' substance use and gambling behaviour



For more information and to find an addiction office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.