



CAUSE FOR CONCERN: NATIONAL STUDY SHOWS REVERSE IN DECADE-LONG DECLINES IN TEEN ABUSE OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL



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More Teens Using Alcohol, Ecstasy and Marijuana Makes Early Parental Action Even More Critical

New York, NY, March 2, 2010 – After a decade of consistent declines in teen drug abuse, a new national study released today by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America® and [MetLife Foundation](#) points to marked upswings in use of drugs that teens are likely to encounter at parties and in other social situations.

According to the 2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation, the number of teens in grades 9-12 that used alcohol in the past month has grown by 11 percent, (from 35 percent in 2008 to 39 percent in 2009), past year Ecstasy use shows a 67 percent increase (from 6 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2009) and past year marijuana use shows a 19 percent increase (from 32 percent in 2008 to 38 percent in 2009). The PATS data mark a reverse in the remarkable, sustained declines in several drugs of abuse among teens: [methamphetamine \(meth\)](#) was down by over 60 percent and past month alcohol and [marijuana](#) use had decreased a full 30 percent over the past decade from 1998-2008.

Underlying these increases are negative shifts in teen attitudes, particularly a growing belief in the benefits and acceptability of drug use and drinking. The percentage of teens agreeing that “being high feels good” increased significantly from 45 percent in 2008 to 51 percent in 2009, while those saying that “friends usually get high at parties” increased from 69 percent to 75 percent over the same time period. The Partnership/ MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) also found a significant drop in the number of teens agreeing strongly that they “don’t want to hang around drug users” – from 35 percent in 2008 to 30 percent in 2009.

“These new PATS data should put all parents on notice that they have to pay closer attention to their kids’ behavior – especially their social interactions – and they must take action just as soon as they think their child may be using drugs or drinking,” said Steve Pasierb, president and CEO of the Partnership.

Dennis White, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation added that “the earlier parents take steps to address a child’s drug or alcohol use, the greater the chance they’ll be effective in preventing a serious problem. We need to be sure parents know when it’s time to act, and how to act when confronted with a substance abuse situation.”

Parents Not Acting Early Enough, Need to Take Immediate Action

The resurgence in teen drug and alcohol use comes at a time when pro-drug cues in popular culture – in film, television and online – abound, and when funding for federal prevention programs has been declining for several years.

This places an even greater burden on parents. Among the parents surveyed for the PATS study, 20 percent say their child (ages 10-19) has already used drugs or alcohol beyond an “experimental” level. Among parents of teens ages 14-19, that percentage jumps to 31 percent,

nearly one third.

Disturbingly, among those parents of teens who have used, nearly half (47 percent) either waited to take action or took no action at all – which studies show put those children at greater risk of continued use and negative consequences.

“We’re very troubled by this upswing that has implications not just for parents, who are the main focus of the Partnership’s efforts, but for the country as a whole,” said Partnership Chairman Patricia Russo. “The United States simply can’t afford to let millions of kids struggle through their academic and professional lives hindered by substance abuse. Parents and caregivers need to play a more active role in protecting their families, trust their instincts and take immediate action as soon as they sense a problem.”

[Time To Act: Resource to Help Parents Take Immediate Action, Safeguarding Kids From Drugs and Alcohol](#)

Discovering that a teen is using drugs or drinking is often a frightening experience for parents – many feel alone, ashamed, and confused about what to do next. The Partnership encourages parents of children who are using drugs or alcohol [to take action as soon as they suspect or know their child is using](#) and provides parents with free, anonymous access, to the most current, research-based information on how to help their child and their family take the next steps. Developed in collaboration with scientists from the Treatment Research Institute, [Time To Act](#), offers step-by-step advice and compassionate guidance from substance abuse experts, family therapists, scientists and fellow parents to help guide families through the process of understanding drug and alcohol use, confronting a child, setting boundaries, and seeking outside help.

Because research tells us that kids in grades 7-12 who learn a lot about the dangers of drugs from their parents are up to 50 percent less likely to ever use, parents are encouraged to have frequent ongoing conversations with their children about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and take early action if they suspect their child is using or might have a problem. Parent visitors to [drugfree.org](#) can learn to [talk with their kids about drugs and alcohol](#) and take charge of the conversation with their kids.

No Improvement in Teen Abuse of Rx and OTC Medicines, Cigarettes, Inhalants, Steroids, Heroin

According to the PATS survey, teen abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines has remained stable with about 1 in 5 teens in grades 9-12 (20 percent) or 3.2 million reporting abuse of a [prescription medication](#) at least once in their lives, and 1 in 7 teens (15 percent) or 2.4 million teens reporting abuse of a prescription pain reliever in the past year. Eight percent or 1.3 million teens have reported OTC [cough medicine abuse](#) in the past year.

PATS shows more than half or 56 percent of teens in grades 9-12 believe Rx drugs are easier to get than illegal drugs. Also, 62 percent believe most teens get Rx drugs from their own family’s medicine cabinets and 63 percent believe Rx drugs are easy to get from their parent’s medicine cabinet, up significantly from 56 percent just last year.

Teen smoking rates have remained stable with 25 percent of teens reporting smoking cigarettes in the past month. Teen inhalant use remains steady at 10 percent for past year use, yet only 66 percent of teens report that “sniffing or huffing things to get high can kill you,” significantly less than the 70 percent of teens who agreed just last year. Inhalant abuse merits careful monitoring – as attitudes towards inhalant abuse weaken, abuse is more likely to increase. Steroid and heroin use among teens remains low at 5 percent for lifetime use.

The 21st annual national study of 3,287 teens in grades 9-12 and 804 parents is nationally projectable with a +/- 2.3 percent margin of error for the teen sample and +/- 3.5 percent for the parent sample. Conducted for the Partnership and MetLife Foundation by the Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research, the 2009 PATS teen study was administered in private, public and parochial schools, while the parents study was conducted through in-home interviews by

deKadt Marketing and Research, Inc. For more information or to view the full PATS Report, please visit drugfree.org.

About the Partnership

The Partnership at drugfree.org is a nonprofit organization that helps parents prevent, intervene in and find treatment for drug and alcohol use by their children. Bringing together renowned scientists, parent experts, and communications professionals, the Partnership translates current research on teen behavior, addiction, and treatment into easy to understand resources at drugfree.org. For parents who need help talking with their kids about drugs, alcohol and other risky behaviors, TimeToTalk.org offers tips and tools promoting parent/child communication. [Time To Act](#) is a step-by-step guide for parents who believe or are sure that their teens are drinking or using drugs and need to know what to do. Through its "360" suite of community programs, the Partnership educates parents and concerned citizens at the grassroots level on the risks of methamphetamine, non-medical prescription drug use and other emerging drug threats, and promotes parenting and community practices designed to prevent teen substance abuse. The Partnership depends on donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and government. The Partnership thanks SAG/AFTRA and the advertising and media industries for their ongoing generosity.

About MetLife Foundation

For over 20 years, MetLife Foundation has provided support for initiatives focusing on substance abuse prevention and education. Since 1999, the Foundation has collaborated with the Partnership for a Drug-Free America on a national public awareness campaign to help parents and caregivers communicate with children about the risks of drug use. MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its long-standing tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.



KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2009 PARTNERSHIP/ METLIFE FOUNDATION ATTITUDE TRACKING STUDY (PATS)

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The Partnership/ MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) shows a reversal in the declines in teen abuse of drugs and alcohol that we've seen since 1998. The national study also highlights the critical need for parents to take immediate action as more teens are using alcohol, Ecstasy and marijuana.

PATS 2009 – Teen Key Findings:

After a decade of consistent declines in teen drug abuse, in which methamphetamine use dropped by over 60 percent, and past-month alcohol and marijuana use were reduced by 30 percent, the 2009 study points to marked upswings in use of drugs that teens are likely to encounter at parties and in other social situations.

- ***The number of teens in grades 9-12 that used alcohol in the past month has grown by 11 percent, (from 35 percent in 2008 to 39 percent in 2009),***
- ***Past year Ecstasy use shows a 67 percent increase (from 6 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2009),***
- ***Past year marijuana use shows a 19 percent increase (from 32 percent in 2008 to 38 percent in 2009).***

Underlying these increases are negative shifts in teen attitudes, particularly a growing belief in the benefits and acceptability of drug use and drinking.

- ***The percentage of teens agreeing that “being high feels good” increased significantly from 45 percent in 2008 to 51 percent in 2009.***
- ***Those saying that “friends usually get high at parties” increased from 69 percent to 75 percent over the same time period.***
- ***The study found a significant drop in the number of teens agreeing strongly that they “don’t want to hang around drug users” – from 35 percent in 2008 to 30 percent in 2009.***

There has been no significant change in teen abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.

- ***Teen abuse of Rx medicines has remained stable with about 1 in 5 teens in grades 9-12 (20 percent) or 3.2 million reporting abuse of a prescription medication at least once in their lives.***
- ***1 in 7 teens (15 percent) or 2.4 million teens reporting abuse of a prescription pain reliever in the past year and eight percent or 1.3 million teens reported OTC cough medicine abuse in the past year.***
- ***More than half, or 56 percent, of teens in grades 9-12 believe Rx drugs are easier to get than illegal drugs.***
- ***62 percent believe most teens get Rx drugs from their own family’s medicine cabinets.***
- ***63 percent believe Rx drugs are easy to get from their parent’s medicine cabinet, up significantly from 56 percent just last year.***

PATS 2009 – Parent Key Findings:

The study finds that many parents are not acting early enough to protect their children from the risks of drugs and alcohol. The resurgence in teen drug and alcohol use comes at a time when pro-drug cues in popular culture – in film, television and online – abound, and when funding for federal prevention programs has been declining for several years. This creates an urgent need for parents to take immediate action as soon as they suspect or know their child is using.

- 20 percent of parents say their child (ages 10-19) has already used drugs or alcohol beyond an “experimental” level.
- Among parents of teens ages 14-19, that percentage jumps to 31 percent, nearly one third.
 - Of those parents of teens who have used, nearly half (47 percent) either waited to take action or took no action at all.

PATS 2009 – Other Trends in Teen Smoking and Drug Use:

- Teen smoking rates have remained stable with 25 percent of teens reporting smoking cigarettes in the past month.
- Teen inhalant use remains steady at 10 percent for past year use, yet only 66 percent of teens report that “sniffing or huffing things to get high can kill you,” significantly less than the 70 percent of teens who agreed just last year.
- Steroid and heroin use among teens remains low at 5 percent for lifetime use.