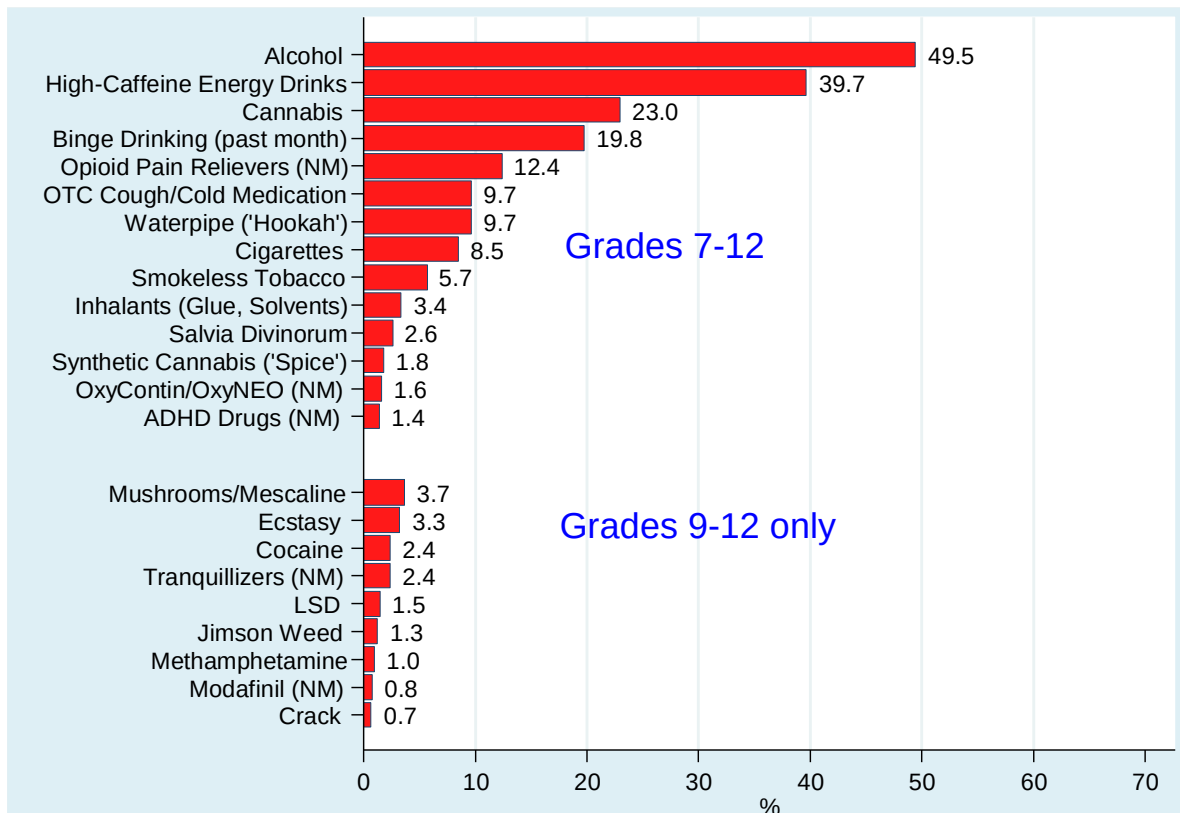


## Drug Use Among Students in Ontario: Highlights from the 2013 OSDUHS

This eBulletin highlights the main alcohol, tobacco and other drug use findings from the 2013 *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS), and selected trends since 1977. The OSDUHS is a repeated, cross-sectional, anonymous survey of students in grades 7–12 in Ontario, with the purpose of monitoring drug use, mental and physical health, gambling, and other risk behaviours. Conducted every two years since 1977, the OSDUHS is the longest ongoing school survey in Canada and one of the longest in the world.

As seen in Figure 1, the 2013 OSDUHS shows that the most commonly used drug among 7th–12th graders is alcohol, with half (50%) of students reporting consuming more than a just a sip of alcohol during the 12 months before the survey. Well over one-third (40%) report consuming caffeinated energy drinks in the past 12 months. Cannabis is the most common illicit drug, as about one-quarter (23%) report using it at least once in the past year. Prescription opioids (such as *Percocet*®, *Tylenol No. 3*®) rank below cannabis, as the nonmedical use of these pain relievers is reported by about 12% of students.

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Ontario Students Reporting Using the Drug at Least Once in the Past Year, 2013 OSDUHS (G7–G12 *n*=10,272; G9–G12 *n*=6,159)**



Notes: (1) NM = nonmedical use, without a doctor's prescription; (2) drugs shown for 'Grades 9-12 only' were not asked of Grade 7 and 8 students; (3) estimates for heroin, ketamine, methoxetamine, BZP pills, and mephedrone ('bath salts') among Grades 9-12 were suppressed due to unreliability

## Demographic Correlates of Student Drug Use

**Sex:** Males are significantly more likely than females to use caffeinated energy drinks, cannabis, over-the-counter (OTC) cough/cold medication to “get high,” a waterpipe (also called a “hookah”), smokeless tobacco, salvia divinorum, mushrooms/mescaline, methamphetamine, and ADHD drugs nonmedically. Females do not exceed males on use of any drug measured in the 2013 survey.

**Grade/Age:** The strongest correlate of drug use found in the 2013 OSDUHS was grade or age. Generally, drug use increases with grade level, typically peaking in grade 11 (ages 16-17) or grade 12 (ages 17-18). The exception to this pattern is inhalant use, which is most prevalent among 7th and 8th graders, and then declines by grade 9.

**Region:** Regional differences are apparent for only three drug use measures. *Compared with the provincial average, Toronto* students are less likely to drink alcohol and binge drink, and are more likely to use prescription opioids nonmedically. *Northern Ontario* students are more likely to drink alcohol and binge drink, and are less likely to use prescription opioids nonmedically. *Western Ontario* students are more likely to use prescription opioids nonmedically. *Eastern Ontario* students do not differ from the province as a whole on any drug measure.

## Trends in Student Drug Use

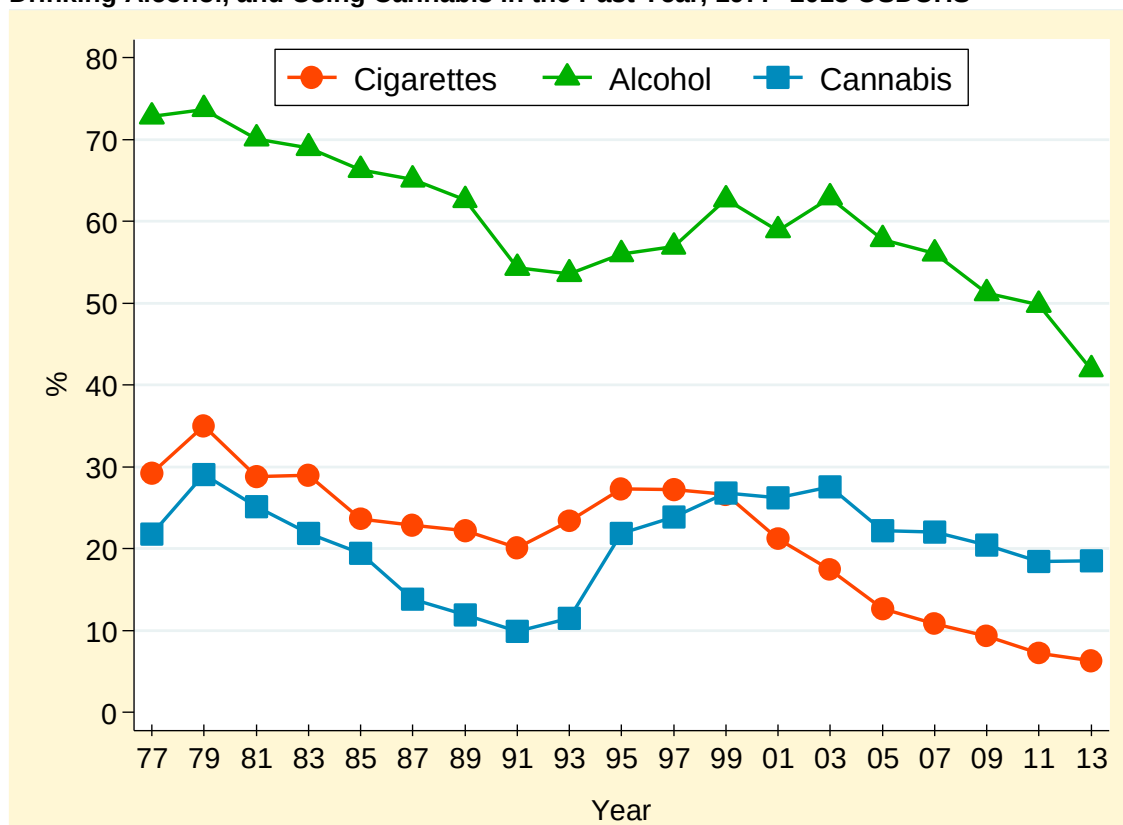
### 1999–2013 Trends (Grades 7–12)

Since the previous survey in 2011, there were significant declines in the percentage of students reporting past year use of alcohol, energy drinks, and inhalants. Past year use of many drugs is significantly lower in 2013 than in 1999, including alcohol, binge drinking, cannabis, cigarettes, mushrooms, ecstasy, and cocaine. The only drug to show an increase was OTC cough or cold medication with dextromethorphan used to “get high,” which has increased in recent years.

### Long-Term Trends, 1977–2013 (Grades 7, 9, 11 only)

Long-term trends are available for 13 drug use measures. Selected drug use trends are presented in Figure 2. Most notably, cigarettes and alcohol follow a similar trend during the past three decades, both showing substantial declines during the past decade and reaching all-time lows in recent years. Cannabis use shows a peak in the late 1970s and another in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Although there has been a steady decline in cannabis use in the past decade, the current level remains higher than the lowest points evident in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Also notable in these trends is the shift in ranking between cigarettes and cannabis following the steeper decline for cigarette use after 1999.

**Figure 2**  
Percentage of Ontario Students in Grades 7, 9, and 11 Reporting Smoking Cigarettes, Drinking Alcohol, and Using Cannabis in the Past Year, 1977–2013 OSDUHS



## Methods

CAMH's *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS) is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary/middle school students in grades 7 and 8 and secondary school students in grades 9 through 12. This repeated cross-sectional survey has been conducted every two years since 1977. The 2013 survey, which used a stratified (region by school level) two-stage (school, class) cluster design, was based on 10,272 students in grades 7 through 12 from 42 public and Catholic school boards, 198 schools, and 671 classes. Self-completed questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were group administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University in classrooms between November 2012 and June 2013. Sixty-three percent (63%) of eligible students in participating classes completed the survey. All estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were accommodated for the complex survey data. The 2013 total sample of 10,272 students is representative of just under one million students enrolled in grades 7 through 12 in publicly funded schools in Ontario.

The 2013 estimates were based on two samples – the full sample of 10,272 7th–12th graders and a subsample of 6,159 high schoolers in grades 9–12. Note that in cycles prior to 1999, only students in grades 7, 9, and 11 were surveyed. Therefore, long-term trends (1977–2013) are limited to only these three grades. The 1999–2013 trends are based on all grades from 7 through 12.

## Measures & Terminology

- **Past year alcohol use** is defined as drinking any type of alcohol during the 12 months before the survey. Use includes consumption on special occasions, but excludes a sip just to try it.
- **Binge drinking** is defined as drinking 5 or more drinks on the same occasion at least once during 4 weeks before the survey.
- **Past year cigarette smoking** is defined as smoking at least one cigarette daily or smoking occasionally during the past 12 months. Those who smoked a few puffs or less than one whole cigarette in the past 12 months were not classified as smokers.
- **Past year use:** used the specified drug at least once during the 12 months before the survey. Cases that responded “don’t know what [the drug] is” were classified as non-users.
- **Nonmedical (NM) drug use:** used the drug without a prescription, or without a doctor’s supervision, at least once during the 12 months before the survey. Note that “non-medical” use does not necessarily *solely* reflect recreational use or to use to “get high.”
- **Nonmedical use of opioid pain relievers** was measured with the question “*In the last 12 months, how often did you use pain relief pills (such as Percocet, Percodan, Tylenol #3, Demerol, OxyContin/OxyNEO, codeine) without a prescription or without a doctor telling you to take them? (We do not mean regular Tylenol, Advil, or Aspirin that anyone can buy in a drugstore.)*”

(continued...)

- **Region:** The survey design divides the province into the following four regions: *Toronto*; *Northern Ontario* (Parry Sound District, Nipissing District and farther north); *Western Ontario* (Peel District, Dufferin County and farther west); and *Eastern Ontario* (Simcoe County, York County and farther east).
- **Statistically significant difference** refers to a difference between (or among) estimates that is statistically different at the  $p < .05$  level, or lower, after adjusting for the sampling design. A finding of statistical significance implies that any differences are not likely due to chance alone.

## Source

Boak, A., Hamilton, H. A., Adlaf, E. M., & Mann, R. E. (2013). *Drug use among Ontario students, 1977–2013: Detailed OSDUHS findings* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 36). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [Available online at <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>]

## Suggested Citation

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2013, December). Drug use among students in Ontario: Highlights from the 2013 OSDUHS. *CAMH Population Studies eBulletin*, 14(4). Retrieved from [http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news\\_and\\_publications/Pages/research\\_population\\_ebulletins.aspx](http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/Pages/research_population_ebulletins.aspx)

For information about CAMH’s population health surveys, please visit our webpage: [http://www.camh.ca/en/research/research\\_areas/community\\_and\\_population\\_health/Pages/population\\_health\\_surveys.aspx](http://www.camh.ca/en/research/research_areas/community_and_population_health/Pages/population_health_surveys.aspx)

Media Enquiries: Tel: 416-595-6015