

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

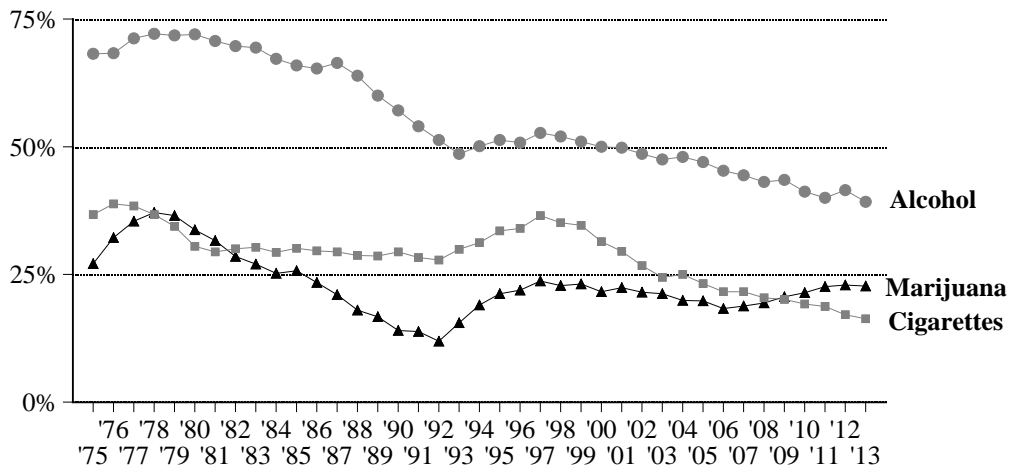
University of Maryland, College Park

Marijuana Use by U.S. 12th Graders Increases Even as Alcohol and Cigarette Use Continue to Decline

The percentage of U.S. high school seniors reporting the use of alcohol or cigarettes in the past month has decreased significantly since the 1970s, according to data from the national Monitoring the Future survey. Alcohol use decreased from a high of 72.1% in 1978 to a low of 39.2% in 2013, while cigarette use decreased from a high of 38.8% in 1976 to a low of 16.3% in 2013. In contrast, self-reported past month marijuana use has increased from the most recent low of 18.3% in 2006 to 22.7% in 2013. While marijuana use by 12th graders has remained relatively unchanged since 2011, it is currently at the highest rate since 1999.

Editor's Note: While these findings may reflect actual increases in marijuana use, social stigmatization may also influence self-reported use. Thus, as marijuana use has become less stigmatized in the last decade, users may now be more willing to report use. While an analysis¹ conducted by MTF staff concludes that "the changing social acceptability of drug use has not affected the truthfulness of self-reports of use," urinalysis results from juvenile arrestees in the District of Columbia² have actually shown a decrease in marijuana positives since 2010 and the percentage of the U.S. general workforce testing positive from marijuana³ decreased from 2000 to 2009 and has remained stable since then.

Percentage of U.S. 12th Grade Students Reporting Past Month Use of Alcohol, Cigarettes, and Marijuana, 1975 to 2013



¹According to Monitoring the Future, there is a high degree of concurrence between the "proportion of 12th graders saying they personally used marijuana in the 30 days prior to the survey and those saying most or all of their friends use marijuana." Since "respondents should have little reason to distort answers about use by unidentified friends or their general exposure to use," the authors "believe that this close correspondence provides persuasive evidence that the changing social acceptability of drug use has not affected the truthfulness of self-reports of use" (p. 431; Monitoring the Future 2012: Volume I).

²See Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia Juvenile Drug Testing Statistics and CESAR FAX, Vol. 22, Issue 6.

³See Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from University of Michigan, "American Teens More Cautious About Using Synthetic Drugs," *Monitoring the Future National Press Release*, December 18, 2013. Available online at <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/data/13data.html#2013data-drugs>.