A report from the New York City Community Health Survey

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NYC Vital Signs

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene July 2004 Volume 3, No. 2

Risky Business?

Health Behaviors of New York City Public High School Students

Behaviors can have a large impact on health. Smoking, substance use, and unsafe sexual practices often start in adolescence and continue into adulthood. These behaviors place young people at immediate risk for poor health. They also contribute to health problems in adulthood, including disability and premature death.

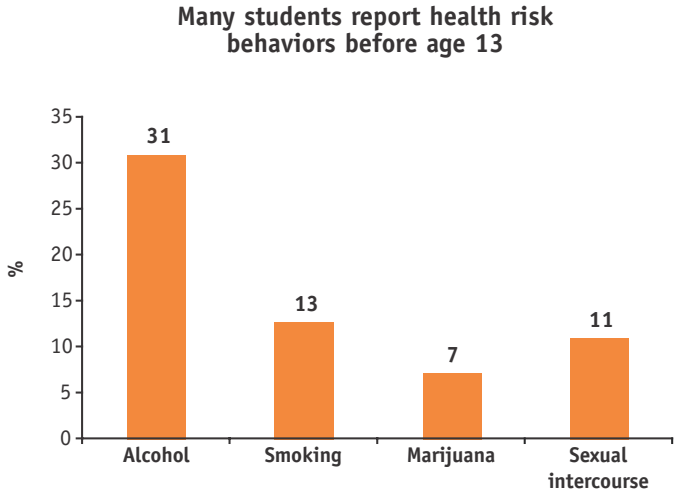
This report presents new data on risk behaviors among New York City (NYC) public high school students and provides important prevention recommendations.

This report is based on findings from the 2003 New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a self-administered, anonymous questionnaire designed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey collects information about health risk behaviors of New York City public high school students. A representative sample of New York City students in 77 public high schools, grades 9–12, completed the survey.

For full details, see the Data and Statistics section at www.nyc.gov/health.

Risky behaviors often start before high school

- Many students report substance use starting at a young age. Before turning 13 years old, 31% of high school students had tried at least 1 alcoholic drink, 13% had smoked a cigarette, and 7% had used marijuana.
- One in 10 NYC public high school students report having had sex before the age of 13.



Almost half of public high school students are sexually active. Many report behaviors that put them at risk for HIV infection

- In 2003, 48% of all NYC public high school students reported having had sex.
- More boys than girls reported having sex (55% versus 41%).
- 17% of high school students reported having had 4 or more sex partners.
- Black and Hispanic students were more likely than Whites and Asians to report having had 4 or more partners. They were also more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant.
- 1 in 4 high school students who were sexually active did not use a condom during last sex.
- Black students reported higher condom use than other groups. Lower condom use was reported among Asian students, and among girls.

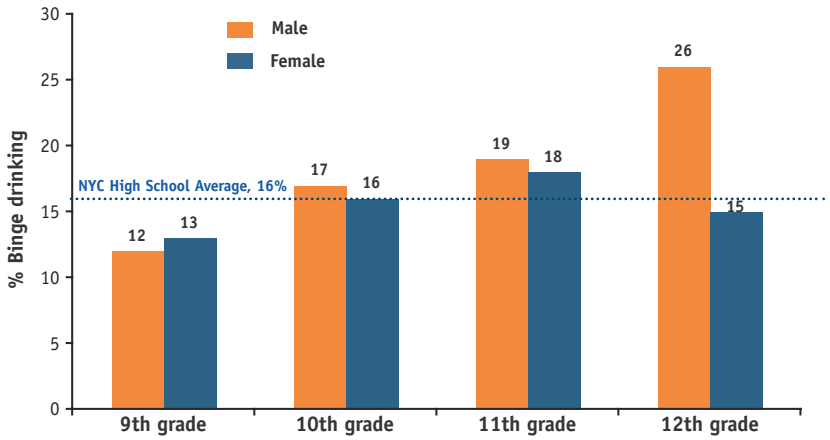
	% who have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant	% with 4 or more sex partners	Of sexually active, % no condom at last sex
Total	**5**	**17**	**24**
Sex			
Boys	4	27	16
Girls	6	8	32
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	7	26	17
Hispanic	6	16	29
White	1	9	25
Asian	1	4	35
Borough			
Bronx	7	20	24
Brooklyn	5	21	17
Manhattan	6	14	29
Queens	4	15	28
Staten Island	2	10	22

For information and resources on teenagers, sexuality, and health see: www.SIECUS.com

One in 6 students report binge drinking in the past month

- In 2003, 35% of high school students reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days, a level that has not decreased in at least 6 years.
- Binge drinking (having 5 or more drinks within a few hours) was reported by more than one quarter of 12th grade boys.

12th grade boys report more binge drinking than students in other grades

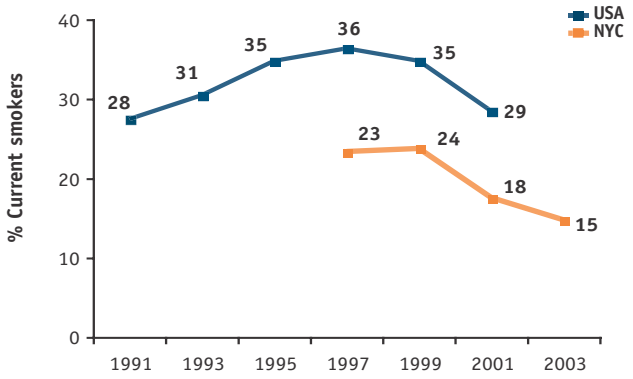


Teenage smoking is on the decline

The good news is:

- Teen smoking has declined nationally and smoking among high school students in NYC is even lower than the national average; between 2001 and 2003 smoking dropped from 18% to 15%.
- Declines in smoking have occurred in all grades.

Current Smoking among NYC high school students is down to 15%



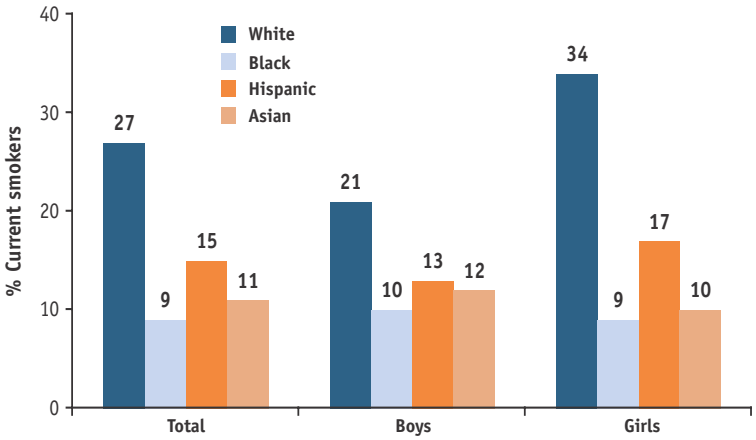
Smoking among White teenage girls is more than double the average teen rate

Yet much work needs to be done:

- White high school teenage girls report much higher levels of smoking than any other group. One in 3 reports being a current smoker.
- White high school students (27%) smoke more than Hispanic (15%), Black (9%), and Asian (11%) students.

Tobacco Information and Prevention Tips for Youth:
www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tips4youth.htm

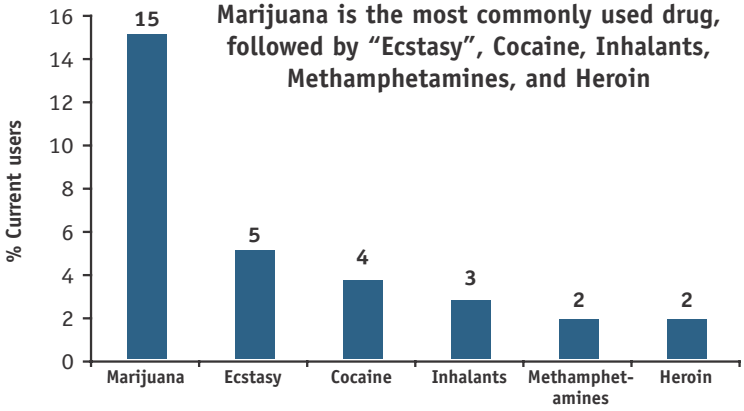
White NYC high school students smoke more than Hispanic or Black students



One in 6 students smoked marijuana in the past 30 days

- 15% of students reported currently using marijuana. This is significantly lower than the national data (24% in 2001).
- Fewer than 5% of students report using other drugs, such as cocaine and heroin.

Marijuana is the most commonly used drug, followed by "Ecstasy", Cocaine, Inhalants, Methamphetamines, and Heroin



Recommendations

✓ **All adolescents need access to comprehensive sex education and reproductive health services.**

- To learn more about reproductive health services for teens, call 311 and ask for the Women's Health line or visit www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/std/std2.html.
- Teen sex education information can be found at www.teenwire.com.

✓ **Tobacco, substance use, and alcohol prevention programs should begin *before* and continue throughout high school.**

- Information for teens to quit smoking can be found at www.teenquit.com/index2.asp.
- Alcohol use prevention information for parents with children age 9–12 is available at www.toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov/.

Data presented here came from the 2003 NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a self-administered, anonymous survey of nearly 7400 New York City public high school students. The survey was conducted by the NYC Departments of Education and Health and Mental Hygiene during the Spring of 2003.

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