

Background

The 2020 Vermont Young Adult Survey (YAS) was conducted from March 25 through May 20 by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) to support the statewide evaluation of Vermont's Regional Prevention Partnerships (RPP) project. This online survey was also conducted by PIRE in 2014, 2016, and 2018, and focuses on Vermont residents aged 18 to 25. Because the survey provides useful epidemiologic data for purposes other than just the evaluation, PIRE provides statewide summaries of the survey data to VDH. This brief report presents selected findings from the 2020 survey, including comparisons with previous years. More details regarding the YAS methods, along with a detailed set of findings, are available through the link provided at the end of this document.

Key Findings

Alcohol Use

- Any use of alcohol in the past 30 days was reported by about 75 percent of Vermont's young adults. That prevalence rate has been very consistent across all years of the survey from 2014 through 2020.
- The percent reporting binge drinking in the past 30 days dropped significantly, from 51 percent in 2018 to 45 percent in 2020.
- Driving after having had too much to drink was also significantly lower in 2020 (1.3 percent) compared to 2018 (3 percent).

Tobacco Use and Electronic Vaping Devices

- About 23 percent of young adults reporting using tobacco products in the past 30 days, down from 26 percent in 2018.
- Use of e-cigarettes and other vaping products (not including vaping products containing marijuana or hash oil) within the past 30 days dropped slightly from 21 percent in 2018 to 18 percent in 2020.

Marijuana Use

- Past 30-day marijuana use among young adults has increased steadily from 39 percent in 2014 to 46 percent in 2020.
- In 2020 almost half (45 percent) of users reported using 20 or more days in the past 30 days. The same was true in 2018.

Prescription Drug Misuse

- Misuse of any prescription drugs dropped from 16 percent in 2018 to 12 percent in 2020.
- Decreases in misuse between 2018 and 2020 were observed for all three classes of prescription drugs: pain relievers, sedatives, and stimulants.
- The misuse rate for prescription stimulants in 2020 (10 percent) continued the pattern of being considerably higher than that for both prescription sedatives (3 percent) and prescription pain relievers (2 percent).

Other Substances

- In 2020, use of hallucinogens within the past year was reported by about 16 percent of young adults. The prevalence rate for cocaine use within the past year was 8.5 percent.
- Heroin use within the past year has decreased from 2.3 percent in 2014 to 0.6 percent in 2020.

Differences in Substance Use by Demographic Subgroups

- Rates of both any alcohol use and binge drinking were substantially higher among persons aged 21 to 25 than those under age 21. Cocaine use in the past year was also higher in the older age group. Use of e-cigarettes and other vaping products, however, was more prevalent in the younger age group.
- Although vaping was still more common among younger persons in 2020, the rate for this age group was lower than it was in 2018, while the opposite was true for persons age 21 to 25.
- Prevalence rates for every substance in 2020 were higher among males compared to females; and for most substances the differences were large and statistically significant.
- Full-time college students were more likely to report alcohol use, binge drinking, and misuse of prescription stimulants than other young adults, and had lower rates of using tobacco products.
- Young adults with higher socioeconomic status (SES, as measured by their mother's level of education) reported higher rates of alcohol use, binge drinking, prescription drug misuse, and cocaine use, and lower rates of tobacco product use and daily or almost daily marijuana use.
- Young adults identifying as a sexual and gender minority group member (SGM) reported higher rates of most substances, although their rates for alcohol use and vaping were similar to those for other young adults.

Changes in Substance Use Behaviors and Emotional Distress Due to COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency

- While some young adults reported stopping use or using specific substances less often, others reported just the opposite.
- Marijuana was the only substance for which there was a substantially higher overall percent of young adults reporting that they started or increased their use (21 percent) as opposed to stopping or decreasing their use (12 percent) in response to COVID.
- Higher rates of emotional distress were reported during the pandemic emergency as opposed to before the emergency began. The increases were especially pronounced for distress characterized by depression (in comparison to anxiety).

For More Information...

A website maintained by PIRE provides easy access to reports and data tables from the Young Adult Survey, as well as for other materials developed for the RPP evaluation. These materials can be accessed at: www.vt-rpp-evaluation.org

Questions regarding the survey or any of the findings presented here or posted on the RPP evaluation website should be directed to Amy Livingston at 802-490-5071, or alivingston@pire.org.

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