

Teen Drug Use Declines 23% In Five Years - Pot, Meth Use Drop Sharply

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Teen drug use has declined by 23 percent since 2001 for 8th, 10th, and 12th graders combined, with reductions in the use of nearly every drug in every drug prevalence category, according to the University of Michigan's 2006 Monitoring the Future (MTF) study, released Thursday. This translates into approximately 840,000 fewer youth using illicit drugs in 2006 than in 2001. These reductions represent a nearly exact achievement of President Bush's goal of reducing youth drug use by 25 percent by 2006. Reductions in illicit drug use among 8th and 10th graders exceeded the President's goal, falling 30 and 26 percent since 2001, respectively.

The study also shows that while marijuana continues to be the most commonly used illicit drug among teens, current use of marijuana has dropped by 25 percent over the past five years. And for the single year from 2005 to 2006, current marijuana use dropped by seven percent among all three grades combined. Teen use of amphetamines, particularly methamphetamine, dropped significantly. The prevalence rates for meth use in all categories, for all three grades, is either the lowest or among the lowest recorded since the question was first included in the MTF survey. Past-month use of methamphetamine among youth plummeted by 50 percent since 2001, with less than one percent (.7%) of students using meth at least once in the last 30 days before the interview.

"There has been a substance abuse sea change among American teens," said John P. Walters, director of National Drug Control Policy. "They are getting the message that dangerous drugs damage their lives and limit their futures. We know that if people don't start using drugs during their teen years, they are very unlikely to go on to develop drug problems later in life. That's why this sharp decline in teen drug use is such important news: It means that there will be less addiction, less suffering, less crime, lower health costs, and higher achievement for this upcoming generation of Americans."

"The Justice Department is committed to protecting teens from the destructive effects of drug use," said Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales. "Since 2001, we have seen the number of young people using drugs, especially methamphetamine, steadily decline. These decreases are an encouraging sign that the Administration's ongoing efforts to combat drug abuse are helping American's children stay away from drugs."

Monitoring the Future also noted reductions in the following drug categories between 2001 and 2006, including:

• Marijuana use is down in all categories for all grades combined. Lifetime, past year, and past 30 day use decreased 18 percent, 20 percent, and 25 percent (from 35% to 29%; 26% to 22%; and 17% to 13%, respectively).

• Use of cigarettes is down since 2001 in all four use categories (lifetime, past month, daily, and more than one-half pack per day) in all three grades.

• Youth use of alcohol was also down across the board “ in all five use categories (lifetime, past year, past month, daily, and more than five drinks in a row in the last two weeks) and in all three grades over five years.

• The use of steroids was down 40.2 percent, 36.8 percent, and 20.6 percent for lifetime, past year, and past month use, respectively for all three grades combined.

• Declines in the hallucinogens LSD and Ecstasy since 2001 have been dramatic, declining by as much as 50 percent to two-thirds.

An area of growing concern is the use of prescription drugs among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders. Indeed, this year's survey shows that the use of OxyContin is the only drug that has seen an increase among all three grades combined: past year use increased 30 percent, from three percent in 2002 to four percent in 2006. In addition, lifetime use of sedatives among seniors increased 18 percent since 2001 (from 9% to 10%), and past year use of Vicodin remained stable for all three grades, with three percent, seven percent, and 10 percent of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders reporting use, respectively.

• The Monitoring the Future study certainly reveals great news today for America's youth and for the Media Campaign, but we must not consider the job done," said Robert W. Denniston, Director of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. "Teens report that their parents seldom stay current with the threats posed by pro-drug sources of misinformation, such as Internet content that normalizes and trivializes drug use. Parents need to keep talking to their kids about the dangers of drug use and stay on top of current technologies that could pose additional risks to their teens' health and safety."

The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, working closely with the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, has made great strides in its efforts to alert teens and parents about the dangers and harms of drug use, including marijuana. The Campaign's new youth campaign, Above the Influence, encourages teens to reject negative influences in their lives; not only drugs themselves, but also pro-drug influences from peers, pop culture, and technology sources. The Media Campaign was created in 1998 by Congress with bipartisan support, with the goal of educating and enabling young people to reject illicit drugs. Counting on an unprecedented blend of public and private partnerships, non-profit community service organizations, volunteerism, and youth-to-youth communications, the Campaign is designed to reach Americans of diverse backgrounds with clear, consistent, and credible anti-drug messages.

However, budget cuts in recent years have forced the Media Campaign to substantially scale back on its advertising and public education budgets. Due to the limited funds, the most recent parent television advertising campaign that was launched in early February 2006 was the only one that targeted parents this year. There is concern that ongoing budget restrictions are starting to produce a flattening out in the

“perception of harm” indicator among teens, which is widely understood as the best predictor of future drug use.

The MTF study is the largest and most significant survey of youth drug use and measures drug, alcohol, and cigarette use and related attitudes among 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students nationwide. Study participants report their drug use behaviors across three time periods: lifetime, past year, and past month. This year, 48,460 students from 410 public and private schools participated in the survey. The survey is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), a component of HHS’s National Institutes of Health, and conducted since its inception by the University of Michigan. Information from this study helps the nation to identify potential drug problem areas and ensure that resources are targeted to areas of greatest need.

The complete MTF study results can be viewed at <http://monitoringthefuture.org>. For more information on the ONDCP National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, visit www.MediaCampaign.org

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