



Current Trends in Student Substance Use in Ontario

Key Takeaways from Addictions Prevention Literacy Webinar #4 – Current trends in student substance use in Ontario – what parents/caregivers need to know, from School Mental Health Ontario

The following information is drawn from the webinar offered by Dr. Hayley Hamilton, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

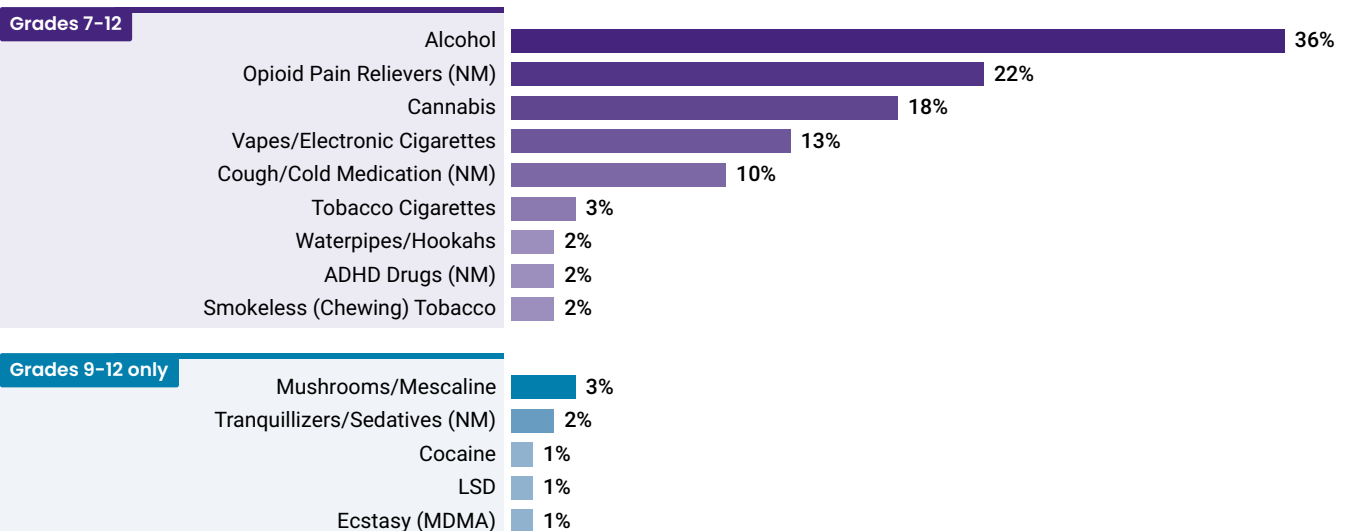
What is the OSDUHS?

The Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) is a long-running, anonymous survey of students in Grades 7–12 from Ontario's publicly funded schools.

In 2023, over 10,000 students from 235 schools across Ontario participated.

It tracks more than drug use—it also looks at mental and physical health, bullying, social media use, gambling and other risk behaviours.

Overview of Past Year Drug Use, 2023 OSDUHS



The information below is a summary of the data from the 2023 survey that was presented in the webinar.

➔ [Access the full survey findings and learn more](#)

What the data shows

TYPE OF DRUGS	
Alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Over 1 in 3 students drank more than a few sips in the past year.• Girls are more likely to drink than boys.• Use increases with grade: 7% in Grade 7 vs. 61% in Grade 12.• 1 in 10 students report binge drinking (5+ drinks in one sitting).• Family members are the most common source of alcohol.
Tobacco + vaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3% of students smoked tobacco cigarettes in the past year• 13% report vaping in the past year• Girls are twice as likely to vape as boys.• Friends are the most common source.• Vape use rose sharply between 2015–2019, then decreased.
Cannabis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 in 6 students report using cannabis in the past year.• Girls are more likely than boys to report use.• Common ways: vaping, smoking joints, edibles.• Friends are the most common source.
Prescription opioids (non-medical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 in 5 students report using prescription opioid pain relievers without a prescription.• Girls are more likely to use non-medically.• Use increased from 13% in 2021 to 22% in 2023, which is similar to the prevalence first seen in 2007.

Regional differences

Survey findings were presented according to 4 regions of the province: GTA, Northern Ontario, Western Ontario, Eastern Ontario.

- Northern Ontario reported higher use of alcohol, vapes, cough/cold medications, and mushrooms.
- GTA reported lower than average use of alcohol, vapes, and mushrooms.
- Western Ontario reported lower than average use of cough/cold medications (non-medical).

Not all youth use substances

Many youth choose not to use substances at all.

- In 1999: 27% of students reported no substance use. In 2023: that number rose to 42%.
- Stats show trends—not destiny. Many young people are making healthy choices.



Looking for support for a child or young person who is facing challenges related to substance use?

SUPPORT	
YOUTH-VAST Program (CAMH)	Support for youth (12–21) facing substance use, vaping or technology overuse concerns Visit: https://www.wehearyou.ca/
ConnexOntario	24/7 helpline with free support + info on mental health + addictions services Visit: connexontario.ca
Indigenous mental health and addictions services in Ontario	Visit: https://www.ontario.ca/page/mental-health-and-addiction-services-indigenous-individuals-and-families
CMHA Ontario	Learn more about addiction services for children and youth in Ontario Visit: https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/finding-and-navigating-addiction-services-for-children-and-youth/

