



SUBSTANCE USE

among university and college students in Canada, 2019–2020

In Canada, **substance use** generally peaks during young adulthood. **Young adults** attending a **postsecondary institution** have a range of new experiences during this life stage.

Through the **2019–2020 Canadian Postsecondary education Alcohol and Drug use Survey (CPADS)**, Health Canada collected data on the prevalence and patterns of substance use and associated harms among postsecondary students aged **17–25** across Canada.



21,297 students

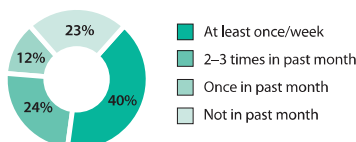


41 universities and colleges/CEGEPs in 4 Canadian regions

Which substances do students use?

Alcohol

How often was alcohol consumed in the past month?

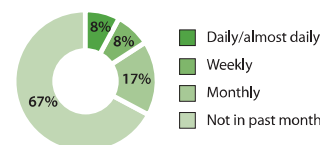
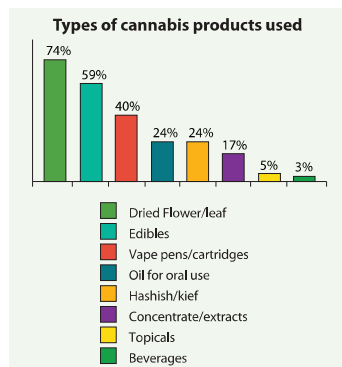


- **77%** consumed **alcohol in the past month**
- **40%** of students consumed alcohol frequently (at least once/week), while **23%** did not consume alcohol in the past month
- Postsecondary students drank more than recommended by **Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines**¹; **21%** of students who consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey, exceeded the guidelines for chronic health effects
- **On a typical drinking day** in the past month, students consumed **4.5 drinks** on average
- **On their heaviest drinking day** in the past month, students consumed **6.9 drinks** on average



Cannabis

How often was cannabis used in the past month?



- **33%** used **cannabis in the past month**
- **8%** used cannabis on a daily basis (5+ days per week)

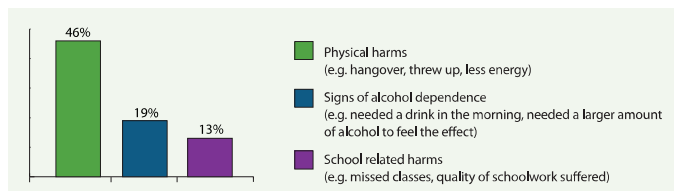
Other substances

- **15%** had used a pain reliever, stimulant, sedative or over-the-counter medication in a problematic way² in the past year
- **15%** used an illegal drug (e.g. cocaine, heroin) in the past year
- **2%** reported daily tobacco use and **17%** used an e-cigarette or vaped nicotine, cannabis or flavouring in the past month



Harms related to alcohol use

- Among students who drank alcohol within the past year, **56%** experienced at least one of 24 different harms from their alcohol use in the past month, most often physical harms



Driving and substance use

Students were less likely to report that they drove a vehicle after consuming alcohol than after smoking or vaporizing cannabis

- Among students who used consumed alcohol in the past 12 months, **9%** drove within two hours of consuming **at least two drinks**



- Among students who used cannabis in the past 12 months, **17%** drove within two hours of **smoking or vaporizing cannabis**

SOURCE:

- <https://ccsa.ca/canadas-low-risk-alcohol-drinking-guidelines-brochure>
- Problematic use of psychoactive pharmaceuticals includes using opioid pain relievers, stimulants, sedatives or over-the-counter medication, in a larger dose, using more frequently than recommended or to get high.

Acknowledgements: These data were made possible through collaboration with 41 postsecondary institutions across Canada. The CPADS is conducted in collaboration with the Postsecondary Education Partnership-Alcohol Harms (PEP-AH). The activities of PEP-AH are supported by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA).

Recommended citation: Health Canada (2019), Canadian Postsecondary Education Alcohol and Drug Use Survey (CPADS).

©Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Health, 2020 | Cat: H134-18/2020E-PDF | ISBN: 978-0-660-38346-0 | Pub: 210008



Health Canada Santé Canada



Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction



PEP – AH
Postsecondary Education Partnership
Alcohol Harms

Canada