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# NEWS

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## **CAUSE FOR CONCERN: NATIONAL STUDY SHOWS REVERSAL IN DECADE-LONG DECLINES IN TEEN ABUSE OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL**

### **More Teens Using Alcohol, Ecstasy and Marijuana Makes Early Parental Action Even More Critical**

After a decade of consistent declines in teen drug abuse, a new national study released by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America® and MetLife Foundation points to marked upswings in use of drugs that teens are likely to encounter at parties and in other social situations.

According to the 2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation, the number of teens in grades 9-12 that used alcohol in the past month has grown by 11 percent, (from 35 percent in 2008 to 39 percent in 2009), past year Ecstasy use shows a 67 percent increase (from 6 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2009) and past year marijuana use shows a 19 percent increase (from 32 percent in 2008 to 38 percent in 2009). The PATS data mark a reversal in the remarkable, sustained declines in several drugs of abuse among teens: methamphetamine (meth) was down by over 60 percent and past month alcohol and marijuana use had decreased a full 30 percent over the past decade from 1998-2008.

Underlying these increases are negative shifts in teen attitudes, particularly a growing belief in the benefits and acceptability of drug use and drinking. The percentage of teens agreeing that “being high feels good” increased significantly from 45 percent in 2008 to 51 percent in 2009, while those saying that “friends usually get high at parties” increased from 69 percent to 75 percent over the same time period. The Partnership/ MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) also found a significant drop in the number

of teens agreeing strongly that they “don’t want to hang around drug users” – from 35 percent in 2008 to 30 percent in 2009.

“These new PATS data should put all parents on notice that they have to pay closer attention to their kids’ behavior – especially their social interactions – and they must take action just as soon as they think their child may be using drugs or drinking,” said Steve Pasierb, president and CEO of the Partnership.

Dennis White, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation added that “the earlier parents take steps to address a child’s drug or alcohol use, the greater the chance they’ll be effective in preventing a serious problem. We need to be sure parents know when it’s time to act, and *how* to act when confronted with a substance abuse situation.”

### **Parents Not Acting Early Enough, Need to Take Immediate Action**

The resurgence in teen drug and alcohol use comes at a time when pro-drug cues in popular culture – in film, television and online – abound, and when funding for federal prevention programs has been declining for several years.

This places an even greater burden on parents. Among the parents surveyed for the PATS study, 20 percent say their child (ages 10-19) has already used drugs or alcohol beyond an “experimental” level. Among parents of teens ages 14-19, that percentage jumps to 31 percent, nearly one third.

Disturbingly, among those parents of teens who have used, nearly half (47 percent) either waited to take action or took no action at all – which studies show put those children at greater risk of continued use and negative consequences.

“We’re very troubled by this upswing that has implications not just for parents, who are the main focus of the Partnership’s efforts, but for the country as a whole,” said Shelly Mowrey, director of programs and communications for the Partnership’s Arizona Affiliate. “We simply cannot let millions of kids struggle through their academic and professional lives hindered by substance abuse. Parents and caregivers need to play a more active role in protecting their families, trust their instincts and take immediate action as soon as they sense a problem.”

### **Time To Act: Resource to Help Parents Take Immediate Action, Safeguarding Kids From Drugs and Alcohol**

Discovering that a teen is using drugs or drinking is often a frightening experience for parents – many feel alone, ashamed, and confused about what to do next. The Partnership

encourages parents of children who are using drugs or alcohol to take action as soon as they suspect or know their child is using and provides parents with free, anonymous access to the most current, research-based information on how to help their child and their family take the next steps. Developed in collaboration with scientists from the Treatment Research Institute, Time To Act, offers step-by-step advice and sympathetic guidance from substance abuse experts, family therapists, scientists and fellow parents to help guide families through the process of understanding drug and alcohol use, confronting a child, setting boundaries, and seeking outside help.

Because research tells us that kids in grades 7-12 who learn a lot about the dangers of drugs from their parents are up to 50 percent less likely to ever use, parents are encouraged to have frequent ongoing conversations with their children about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and take early action if they think their child is using or might have a problem. Parent visitors to drugfree.org can learn to talk with their kids about drugs and alcohol and take charge of the conversation with their kids.

### **No Improvement in Teen Abuse of Rx and OTC Medicines, Cigarettes, Inhalants, Steroids, Heroin**

According to the PATS survey, teen abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines has remained stable with about 1 in 5 teens in grades 9-12 (20 percent) or 3.2 million reporting abuse of a prescription medication at least once in their lives, and 1 in 7 teens (15 percent) or 2.4 million teens reporting abuse of a prescription pain reliever in the past year. Eight percent or 1.3 million teens have reported OTC cough medicine abuse in the past year.

PATS shows more than half or 56 percent of teens in grades 9-12 believe Rx drugs are easier to get than illegal drugs. Also, 62 percent believe most teens get Rx drugs from their own family's medicine cabinets and 63 percent believe Rx drugs are easy to get from their parent's medicine cabinet, up significantly from 56 percent just last year.

Teen smoking rates have remained stable with 25 percent of teens reporting smoking cigarettes in the past month. Teen inhalant use remains steady at 10 percent for past year use, yet only 66 percent of teens report that "sniffing or huffing things to get high can kill you," significantly less than the 70 percent of teens who agreed just last year. Inhalant abuse merits careful monitoring – as attitudes towards inhalant abuse weaken, abuse is more likely to increase. Steroid and heroin use among teens remains low at 5 percent for lifetime use.

The 21<sup>st</sup> annual national study of 3,287 teens in grades 9-12 and 804 parents is nationally projectable with a +/- 2.3 percent margin of error for the teen sample and +/- 3.5 percent for the parent sample. Conducted for the Partnership and MetLife Foundation by the Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research, the 2009 PATS teen study was administered in private, public and parochial schools, while the parents study was conducted through in-home interviews by deKadt Marketing and Research, Inc. For more information or to view the full PATS Report, please visit [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org).

**About The Partnership for a Drug-Free America**

*The Partnership for a Drug-Free America was formed in 1986 by the communications industry to educate children, parents and communities about the consequences of illicit drug use and the benefits of living drug-free. The Partnership is highly regarded for its proven effective media campaigns and public awareness programs. Independent studies from academia, business and science document the profound impact of The Partnership's programs on attitudes and behavior.*

*The Arizona Affiliate was established in 2003 to carry out The Partnership's mission to reduce illicit drug use in Arizona while meeting the unique needs of communities. Through its programs, the Arizona Affiliate inspires and empowers Arizonans to join in a united effort to prevent illicit drug use among teens through community-based education. The Partnership is a non profit 501-c-3 organization.*

*For more information, visit the Affiliate website at [www.PartnerUpAz.org](http://www.PartnerUpAz.org).*

**About MetLife Foundation**

*For over 20 years, MetLife Foundation has provided support for initiatives focusing on substance abuse prevention and education. Since 1999, the Foundation has collaborated with the Partnership for a Drug-Free America on a national public awareness campaign to help parents and caregivers communicate with children about the risks of drug use. MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its long-standing tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. For more information about the Foundation, visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).*