

News from the Wyoming Department of Health and the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center

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Study Says Fewer Wyoming Students Drinking and Smoking

Reports from a new survey show Wyoming continues to see overall significant declines in junior high and high school students saying they use alcohol and tobacco.

Administered for the Wyoming Department of Health by the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC), a University of Wyoming department, the 2012 Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) student survey provides detailed state- and county-level data on substance abuse issues, risk factors and protective factors affecting Wyoming youth.

The survey indicates 17 of the 19 participating counties saw substantial reductions in alcohol use and 15 of 19 had substantial reductions in tobacco use among Wyoming junior high and high school students.

“Over the last several years, together with many community partners, our department has focused on alcohol misuse and abuse issues such as underage drinking and tobacco use as prevention priorities and we are pleased to see some positive results,” said Keith Hotle, Chronic Disease and Substance Abuse/Suicide Prevention Unit manager with the Wyoming Department of Health.

“Not surprisingly, at the state level, alcohol remains the most commonly reported used substance in all grade levels,” Hotle said.

Current (past 30 days) alcohol use in the 8th grade has decreased from 24 percent over 2006-10 to 18 percent in 2012, and for 10th grade from 38 percent in 2006-10 to 32 percent in 2012. Self-reported binge drinking has also declined from 2006-10 averages of 14 percent to 10 percent in 2012 for 8th grade and from 24 percent to 17 percent for 10th grade.

“Smoking data is similarly encouraging,” Hotle said. From 2006-10, cigarette use sometime during the lifetime was reported at an average rate of 12 percent for 6th grade and 48 percent for 12th grade. Results for 2012 describe an 8 percent rate for 6th grade and 43 percent rate for 12th grade.

Hotle noted in 2012 Wyoming youth in middle school reported an average rate of current prescription drug misuse (past 30 days) at 1 percent, while high school youth reported an average misuse rate of 4.5 percent. “This is an issue many communities are concerned with,” he said.

Eric Canen, the study’s principal investigator and senior research scientist with WYSAC, said it was interesting that Wyoming students consistently overestimate how often and to what degree

most students in their schools use drugs and alcohol. “For example, the odds of perceived methamphetamine use by most students were 92 to 213 times greater than the odds of actual methamphetamine use, depending upon the grade level,” Canen said.

The Wyoming Department of Health uses data from the PNA to monitor changes in important youth substance use trends. Community agencies also use the data to set priorities for their efforts and sometimes to seek out additional funding.

“Unfortunately, there are holes in the data for four counties, Canen noted. “In 2012, six school districts chose not to participate or had response rates too low to be included in the survey results. Continuing to provide this important information requires the cooperation and participation of schools throughout Wyoming.”

To review the detailed state- and county-level reports and fact sheets, please visit www.pnasurvey.org.

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