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Prevalence and correlates of marijuana use in Canada, 2012

According to the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey–Mental Health, about 12% of Canadians aged 15 or older (3.4 million) used marijuana in the year prior to the survey. The percentage was higher among males (16%) than among females (8%).

One-third (33%) of 18- to 24-year-olds reported past-year use of marijuana. The percentages of people in other age groups reporting past-year use were lower: 20% at ages 15 to 17, 16% at ages 25 to 44, 7% at ages 45 to 64, and less than 1% at age 65 or older. In all age groups except 15 to 17 (among whom percentages were similar), males were more likely than females to report past-year use.

In 2012, 16% of Nova Scotians and 15% of British Columbians reported using marijuana in the past year, significantly above estimates for the rest of Canada. Saskatchewan (10%) residents had lower-than-average reported use.

About 2% of the population aged 15 or older reported daily use of marijuana in the previous year, and another 3% reported at least weekly use (one or more times a week).

About 43% of Canadians aged 15 or older have tried marijuana with over half (54%) of 18- to 24-year-olds and 25- to 44-year-olds having ever used it. This compared with 46% at ages 45 to 64, 25% at ages 15 to 17 and 13% of seniors.

In both 2002 and 2012, the overall prevalence of past-year marijuana use among Canadians aged 15 or older was stable at around 12%. However, trends differed by age. Past-year use declined by 30% among 15- to 17-year-olds, remained unchanged at ages 18 to 24, and increased slightly at ages 25 to 44 and at age 45 or older.

Over the 10 years, the percentage of Canadians who said they had ever used marijuana fell among 15- to 17-year-olds and 18- to 24-year-olds, remained stable among 25- to 44-year-olds, and rose among older age groups. Some of the increase in lifetime prevalence at older ages, especially 45 to 64, may simply reflect aging of the cohort who were in the 25- to 44 age group in 2002.

About 97% of Canadians who have used other illicit drugs (such as cocaine, hallucinogens and heroin) and 72% who have used psychotherapeutic pharmaceuticals (such as sedatives, stimulants and opioid analgesics) for non-medical purposes have also used marijuana. Much lower percentages of marijuana users have used other illicit drugs (36%) and psychotherapeutic pharmaceuticals (16%). Because the survey did not ask about the age of the respondent at initiation for each drug used, it is not known if marijuana use preceded or followed use of the other drugs.



Note to readers

This analysis investigates the prevalence of, and factors associated with, past-year and lifetime marijuana use by the household population aged 15 or older. The data are from the cross-sectional 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey–Mental Health (CCHS–MH). Estimates for 2012 are compared with those for 2002.

Past-year and lifetime marijuana use were based on responses to the following questions: "Have you ever used or tried marijuana or hashish?" and "Have you used it in the past 12 months?" Past-year users were classified according to how frequently they used marijuana in the 12 months before they were interviewed: once, less than once a month, one to three times a month, weekly, or daily. Marijuana users (past-year and lifetime) were further subdivided into repeat users (excluding one-time use).

Marijuana use was examined in relation to the use of other illicit drugs (such as cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine, hallucinogens, heroin, inhalants/solvents) and psychotherapeutics (such as sedatives/tranquilizers, stimulants, opioid analgesics) for non-medical reasons.

The data have several limitations. The information is self-reported and so may be subject to social desirability bias. No information is available about intensity of use or the amount of active ingredients consumed. The survey did not collect information about age at initiation of marijuana use. Respondents whose past-year use varied considerably over the period were instructed to reference the period when use was highest, which may overstate typical use. Finally, no information is available from the CCHS–MH about the use of marijuana for medical purposes.

The article "Prevalence and correlates of marijuana use in Canada, 2012" is available in the April 2015 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 26, no. 4 ([82-003-X](#)) from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca).

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Michelle Rotermann (michelle.rotermann@statcan.gc.ca), Health Analysis Division.

This issue of *Health Reports* contains another research article, "Colorectal cancer incidence in the Aboriginal population of Ontario, 1998 to 2009."

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this research article, contact Stephanie W. Young (Stephanie.Young@cancercare.on.ca), Cancer Care Ontario.

For more information about *Health Reports*, contact Janice Felman (613-799-7746; janice.felman@statcan.gc.ca), Health Analysis Division.