

Canadian Community Health Survey, 2016

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Unhealthy behaviours such as smoking, heavy drinking and illicit drug use are risk factors for chronic disease. Over one-third of Canadians aged 12 or older (around 11 million people) reported one or more of these unhealthy behaviours, according to new data from the 2016 Canadian Community Health Survey.

Half of 18 to 34 year olds (50.3%) reported at least one of these unhealthy behaviours. Although Canadian youth aged 12 to 17 are below the legal age for buying alcohol and cigarettes, 10.1% reported one of the three unhealthy behaviors.

Canadians reporting 'fair' or 'poor' mental health were more likely to have one of these behaviours. In 2016, 49.5% of those who reported their mental health as 'fair' or 'poor' had at least one of these unhealthy behaviours, compared with 35.9% of those who reported 'very good' or 'excellent' mental health.

Heavy drinking

Almost one-fifth of Canadians (19.0%) aged 12 and older reported alcohol consumption that classified them as heavy drinkers. The threshold to be considered a heavy drinker is different for males and females. While 23.8% of males reported drinking five or more drinks on one occasion at least once per month in the past year, 14.2% of females reported four or more drinks. The highest proportion of heavy drinking for both sexes was among 18 to 34 year olds, where 34.4% of males and 23.4% of females were heavy drinkers. Among those aged 65 or older, 7.2% were heavy drinkers.

According to Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines, long-term risks for heavy drinking include liver disease and certain cancers. To reduce these long-term risks, the guidelines recommend that males consume no more than 15 drinks per week and no more than 3 drinks per day. Females are recommended to have no more than 10 drinks per week and no more than 2 drinks per day. In 2016, 19.2% of males and 14.1% of females aged 12 or older drank more alcohol over a week than set out in the guidelines. The majority of those who exceeded the guidelines had gone over the daily limits.

Although it is illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 or 19 (depending on the province) in Canada, more than one-quarter (27.9%) of Canadian youth aged 12 to 17 reported drinking alcohol in the last 12 months, and 41.8% of those who did drink alcohol reported doing so at least once a month. In 2016, 2.5% of youths reported a weekly alcohol consumption that exceeded the low-risk drinking guidelines. The majority of youths who were drinkers and who exceeded the guidelines were aged 15 to 17.

Smoking

In 2016, 12.0% of Canadians aged 12 and older (roughly 3.7 million people) were daily smokers, while 4.9% (1.5 million) were occasional smokers. As with heavy drinking, males were more likely to smoke cigarettes than females. While the majority (93.1%) of youths aged 12 to 17 have never smoked a whole cigarette, 3.6% reported that they smoked daily or occasionally in 2016.

Of the roughly 3.7 million daily smokers, over half (52.2%) reported smoking less than 15 cigarettes per day. About one-fifth (646,000) of daily smokers reported smoking 25 or more cigarettes per day. The majority (83.7%) of the 1.5 million occasional smokers reported five or less cigarettes on the days they did smoke.

Smokers were more likely to report daily stress than non-smokers. In 2016, 30.2% of smokers reported that most days were 'quite a bit' or 'extremely' stressful. Among non-smokers, 21.1% reported daily stress. Smokers were also less likely (86.0%) than non-smokers (92.5%) to report being satisfied overall with their life.

In 2016, one-quarter of Canadians (24.6%) reported that they were non-smokers but at one point were a daily or occasional smoker. Within the 12 months prior to the survey, 464,000 people completely quit smoking.



Illicit drug use

The CCHS collected information on illicit drug use in 2016 by asking Canadians about methods for using drugs. Canadians were asked if they had smoked, taken orally, or snorted or sniffed illicit drugs, or if they used a needle to inject or be injected with any drug not prescribed by a doctor.

In 2016, one-third of Canadians aged 12 or older (around 9.8 million people) reported using illicit drugs by one of these methods in their life, while 1 in 10 (10.7%) reported using these drugs in the past year. Males were almost twice as likely as females to have reported using drugs in the past year (13.9% of males versus 7.7% of females).

While the majority of the 3.2 million drug users in the last year only reported smoking as their method of use, about one-third (969,000) reported that they had used illicit drugs by a different method (orally, snorting or sniffing, or injecting).

Young adults aged 18 to 34 were the most likely (21.5%) to report drug use in the past year, more than twice the drug use rate than any other age group. Among youths aged 12 to 17, 6.1% reported using illicit drugs in the past year.

Past year drug use was more than five times higher among those who were smokers or heavy drinkers (24.9%) than those who did not have either behaviour (4.5%). Furthermore, more than one-quarter (29.0%) of cigarette smokers also reported using illicit drugs in the past year. For those aged 18 to 35, about half (46.8%) who smoked cigarettes also reported using drugs in the past year.

Note to readers

This article features analysis based on data from the 2016 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). The CCHS is an annual population health survey that provides insight into health conditions and behaviours of the Canadian population. The analysis in this release covers selected health indicators on cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, and illicit drug use. The fact sheet [Healthy behaviours, 2016](#) also analyses the health behaviours of the population, but from the perspective of Canadians who have healthy behaviours: non-smoking, non-heavy drinking, fruit and vegetable consumption, and physical activity.

Residents of Indian reserves are excluded from the survey's coverage, therefore the estimates in this article only include First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit. Other exclusions from the survey are health care institutions, some remote areas, and full-time members of the Canadian Forces (living on or off military bases).

In this article, when two estimates are said to be different, this indicates that the difference was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (p-value less than 5%).

Alcohol consumption

Estimates of heavy drinking are based on respondents' reported pattern of alcohol consumption over the course of the past 12 months. The estimates of those who drank more than the Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines are based on the reported alcohol consumption over a one week period (day-by-day) prior to the interview. When asked about the number of drinks consumed, respondents are told that a 'drink' refers to:

- a bottle or small can of beer, cider or cooler with 5% alcohol content, or a small draft;
- a glass of wine with 12% alcohol content;
- a glass or cocktail containing 1½ ounces (45 millilitres) of a spirit with 40% alcohol content.

Drug use

Data on illicit drug use is based on a series of questions about different methods for using drugs. Respondents are asked if they have smoked, taken orally, or snorted or sniffed any illicit drugs or if they have used a needle to inject (or be injected with) any drug not prescribed by a doctor.

Available in CANSIM: tables [105-0508](#), [105-0510](#) and [105-0511](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3226](#).

Additional products featuring the most recent results from the 2016 Canadian Community Health Survey are now available from our website. This includes the *Health Fact Sheets (82-625-X)*: "[Chronic conditions, 2016](#)", "[Diabetes, 2016](#)", "[Fruit and vegetable consumption, 2016](#)", "[Heavy drinking, 2016](#)", "[Life satisfaction, 2016](#)", "[Primary health care, 2016](#)", "[Smoking, 2016](#)", and "[Healthy behaviours, 2016](#)".

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).