

# Alcohol and drug use in Canada, 2019

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The COVID-19 pandemic has led to many changes in Canadians' behaviours and lifestyles. Moreover, the disruption and stress caused by the pandemic may have led a number of Canadians to consume more cannabis, alcohol and tobacco products than usual. For example, according to an article based on data from the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, in January 2021, [34% of Canadians](#) reported having increased their cannabis consumption.

New data from the 2019 Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CADS) are released today. Although the data were collected before the start of the pandemic, they are an important benchmark for understanding the alcohol and drug use patterns of Canadians. When similar data are collected in the future, it will be possible to determine, for instance, whether behaviour and consumption pattern changes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are sustained over the longer term.

The 2019 CADS was designed to collect detailed information on alcohol and drug use in Canada. It also includes specific questions about cannabis use, such as the types of products used, methods of consumption and harm related to use. This survey was conducted after the *Cannabis Act (C-45)* came into effect on October 17, 2018, and measures the behaviours of Canadians following the legalization of cannabis.

## In 2019, one in five Canadians reported having used cannabis in the past 12 months

In 2019, 21% of Canadians reported having used cannabis in the past 12 months. A [study based on data from the National Cannabis Survey](#) showed that the prevalence of cannabis use has been increasing since its legalization in October 2018. Results from the 2019 CADS and the 2017 Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey corroborate this observation. In fact, cannabis use in the year before the survey increased among Canadians aged 15 and older, from 15% in 2017 to 21% in 2019, for both men (from 19% to 23%) and women (from 11% to 19%).

Other drug use was considerably less common than cannabis use. In 2019, about 4% of Canadians reported having used at least one illegal drug. Among these users, cocaine was the most commonly used drug (2%), accounting for approximately half (49%) of illegal drug use. Illegal drug use includes consumption of at least one of the following substances: cocaine, ecstasy, methamphetamine, hallucinogens, inhalants, heroin and salvia.

In 2019, the proportion of Canadians who reported having used at least one illegal drug in the past 12 months was similar to that in 2017.

Alcohol remained the most commonly used substance among Canadians. According to data from the 2019 CADS, more than three in four Canadians (76%) reported having consumed alcoholic beverages in the past year, unchanged from 2017.

In addition, 14% of Canadians reported smoking cigarettes at the time of the survey, unchanged from 2017.

Use of alcohol, cigarettes, cannabis and illegal drugs varied among Canadians aged 15 and older. In 2019, a higher percentage of men than women had consumed alcohol (78% and 75%, respectively) or used cannabis (23% and 19%, respectively) or tobacco (16% and 12%, respectively) in the 12 months prior to the survey.



**Table 1**  
**Percentage of people who reported having used alcohol, cannabis, cigarettes or an illegal drug in the past year, household population aged 15 and older, Canada, 2019**

	Total population	Percent	Lower limit of confidence interval (95%) <sup>4</sup>	Upper limit of confidence interval (95%) <sup>4</sup>
	thousands of people	%		
<b>Alcohol<sup>1</sup></b>	23,697.4	76.5	75.1	77.7
Sex				
Men <sup>2</sup>	11,971.1	78.3	76.2	80.2
Women	11,726.3	74.7 <sup>3</sup>	72.8	76.4
Age group				
15 to 19 years	986.0	46.3 <sup>3</sup>	36.8	52.8
20 to 24 years <sup>2</sup>	1,912.6	84.4	77.0	88.6
25 years and older	20,798.8	78.2 <sup>3</sup>	76.3	78.9
<b>Cannabis<sup>1</sup></b>	6,410.3	20.7	19.4	22.0
Sex				
Men <sup>2</sup>	3,490.5	22.8	21.0	24.8
Women	2,919.7	18.6 <sup>3</sup>	17.0	20.3
Age group				
15 to 19 years	467.9	21.9 <sup>3</sup>	16.0	29.4
20 to 24 years <sup>2</sup>	1,010.6	44.6	37.1	52.4
25 years and older	4,931.8	18.5 <sup>3</sup>	17.4	19.8
<b>Current cigarette smokers</b>	4,236.0	13.7	12.7	14.7
Sex				
Men <sup>2</sup>	2,380.0	15.6	14.0	17.3
Women	1,856.0	11.8 <sup>3</sup>	10.7	13.1
Age group				
15 to 19 years	171.9	8.1	4.6	13.9
20 to 24 years <sup>2</sup>	315.6	13.9	9.9	19.3
25 years and older	3,748.5	14.1	13.1	15.2
<b>Illegal drug<sup>1</sup></b>	1,100.3	3.6	3.0	4.2
Sex				
Men <sup>2</sup>	628.7	4.1	3.2	5.3
Women	471.6	3.0	2.3	3.9
Age group				
15 to 19 years	65.7	3.1 <sup>3</sup>	1.4	6.8
20 to 24 years <sup>2</sup>	310.2	13.7	9.3	19.7
25 years and older	724.4	2.7 <sup>3</sup>	2.2	3.4

1. In the past 12 months.  
 2. Reference category.  
 3. Significantly different from reference category.  
 4. These confidence intervals are used to express the precision of the estimates.  
 Source(s): Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey (5289).

## In 2019, current cigarette smokers were more likely than people who did not currently smoke cigarettes to have used cannabis in the last 12 months

Previous Canadian and international research on adults and youth has shown an association between tobacco consumption and an increased likelihood of using other types of substances, including cannabis. According to data from the 2019 CADS, the proportion of Canadians aged 15 and older who reported having used cannabis in the last 12 months was more than two times higher among current cigarette smokers (41%) than among people who did not currently smoke cigarettes (17%).

As well, in 2019, current cigarette smokers younger than 25 (85% among 15- to 19-year-olds and 83% among 20- to 24-year-olds) were more likely to have used cannabis in the past 12 months than those aged 25 and older (36%).

The increase in cannabis consumption observed in 2019 can be seen even among people who did not currently smoke cigarettes, where the probability of having consumed cannabis over the last 12 months was higher in 2019 (17%) than in 2017 (11%), regardless of sex or age group.

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of people who reported having used cannabis in the past 12 months by smoking status, household population aged 15 and older, Canada, 2017 and 2019**

	2019 Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey		2017 Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey	
	Current cigarette smokers	People who did not currently smoke cigarettes <sup>4</sup>	Current cigarette smokers	People who did not currently smoke cigarettes <sup>4</sup>
	%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>36.6</b>	<b>10.6<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Sex</b>				
Men <sup>1</sup>	43.2	19.1	39.6	13.9 <sup>3</sup>
Women	39.1	15.9 <sup>2</sup>	33.1	7.4 <sup>23</sup>
<b>Age group</b>				
15 to 19 years	84.6	16.5 <sup>2</sup>	69.3	14.8 <sup>2</sup>
20 to 24 years <sup>1</sup>	83.0	38.4	64.1 <sup>3</sup>	26.0 <sup>3</sup>
25 years and older	35.9 <sup>2</sup>	15.7 <sup>2</sup>	32.7 <sup>2</sup>	8.8 <sup>23</sup>

1. Reference category.

2. Significantly different from reference category.

3. Significantly different from 2019 Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey category.

4. Significantly different from current cigarette smokers category.

**Source(s):** Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey ([4440](#)) and Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey ([5289](#)).

### **Note to readers**

The Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CADS) is a general population survey of alcohol and drug use among Canadians aged 15 and older. The CADS is conducted by Statistics Canada on behalf of [Health Canada](#), using a self-administered electronic questionnaire or a telephone interview.

Previously known as the Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CTADS), this survey was conducted to produce results on tobacco, alcohol and drug use. The survey was conducted annually from 1999 to 2012 and then every two years from 2013 to 2017 using telephone interviews. For the first time in 2019, the CTADS was separated into two different surveys: the CADS and the Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey. These two surveys were both conducted in 2019.

The target population for the CADS is the household population aged 15 and older living in Canada, with the following three exceptions: residents of Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut; residents of First Nations reserves; and full-time residents of institutions.

Data were collected from June to December 2019, inclusively. The CADS response rate was 50.9%, representing 10,293 respondents of the sample.

### **For the purposes of this analysis and survey**

Users or consumers are defined as having used or consumed some form of any of the substances referred to in the survey, regardless of duration, quantity or intensity of use.

Cannabis includes marijuana, hashish, hash oil and any other preparation of the cannabis plant.

There is no distinction between tobacco and cigarettes. Current cigarette smokers include daily and occasional smokers.

Survey sampling weights were applied to ensure that the analyses are representative of the Canadian population aged 15 and older.

All differences between the characteristics and the comparison groups analyzed are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  and were tested using t-test statistics and bootstrap replicate weights to account for the complex sampling design.

### **Data limitations and cautions**

The information is self-reported and has not been validated. Social desirability and fear of punishment, both of which are potential sources of bias, may be especially relevant to this analysis. Changes over time in respondents' willingness to admit drug use may influence the statistics but remain difficult to measure.

### **Additional information**

Some indicators, such as the current cigarette smoking rate and alcohol consumption rate, are available at the national and provincial levels from other Statistics Canada surveys, such as the Canadian Community Health Survey.

For various reasons, there are differences between the rates produced by these two surveys. For example, the length of the reference period changes the prevalence rate. Although this can influence the estimates produced at a single point in time, the trends that emerge from the two surveys are comparable over time. Statistics Canada recommends that users, rather than comparing smoking rates between the two surveys, choose a single source, based on their objectives, and use that source consistently.

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5289](#).**

The 2019 Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey microdata file is now available upon request.

For more information about the survey and the drug and alcohol results, please write to the Office of Drug Research and Surveillance, Controlled Substances Directorate, Health Canada ([hc.odss-bssd.sc@canada.ca](mailto:hc.odss-bssd.sc@canada.ca)).

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; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).