

Survey: Teen alcohol, marijuana use rising again

March 2, 2010 by CAROL POLSKY / carol.polsky@newsday.com



After a decade of decline, teen use of alcohol and marijuana rose last year, according to a national survey released Tuesday by the nonprofit Partnership for a Drug-Free America.

Local substance-abuse experts agreed that those trends are evident on Long Island, which has seen more attention paid to the sharp upswing in heroin and opiate pill use.

"I am not surprised by the study: I believe [it] reflects what we're seeing," said Cari Besserman, vice president and director for Long Island

services for the drug-treatment program Phoenix House.

He said drug use isn't limited to "the student failing out of school or experiencing financial instability at home. It's the cheerleader and the straight-A student who are also experimenting and increasing the use of these drugs."

The results, based on questionnaires filled out by 3,287 9th- through 12th-graders, found an increase compared with 2008 among those who said that in the past month they'd consumed alcohol (39 percent, up from 35 percent) or marijuana (38 percent, up from 32 percent).

Fewer reported strongly negative feelings toward substance use (30 percent, down from 35 percent), as more said friends were likely to get high at parties (75 percent, up from 69 percent) and agreed that "being high feels good" (51 percent, up from 45 percent).

Jeffrey Reynolds, executive director of the Long Island Council of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, said he agreed "a hundred percent" that teen alcohol and marijuana use are up. Compared with the national findings, heroin use is greater here and Ecstasy use lower, he said.

LICADD does screening, brief intervention, treatment placement and relapse prevention.

"Our calls in the past year are up 400 percent for adolescents," Reynolds said.

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According to Jennifer Farrell, spokeswoman for the state Office of [Alcoholism](#) and Substance Abuse Services, 1,680 Long Islanders ages 12-17 were admitted to treatment programs from January 2008 to January 2009. Of those, 370 were for alcohol, 1,243 for marijuana, 162 involved heroin and other opiates, 34 for crack and 51 for other drugs, including Ecstasy.

Caroline Sullivan, director of Daytop Village Suffolk Outreach in [Huntington Station](#), said her organization has about 60 clients aged 13 to 25 in its outpatient and intensive outpatient programs.

"Absolutely, between the ages of 13 and 18 alcohol and marijuana use has skyrocketed over the last four or five years," she said, even as the age of clients seeking treatment has dropped to 15-16 from 17-18.

"What has increased dramatically is the number of second-generation substance abusers," she said. "Mom and dad are still smoking pot and now their kids are smoking pot, too."

The survey also interviewed 800 parents and concluded that most waited too long to seek treatment for their children.

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