

Winter 2024

THE ANTIDOTE

News and Notes from the Blue Ridge Poison Center

U.S. High School Student Substance Use/Misuse Trends

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released the report [Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary and Trends](#). This report contains data collected over the ten year period 2013-2023 about the health behaviors and experiences of high school students. The report tells an important story about the health and well-being of our nation's youth.



The survey shares insights about students' use of alcohol, cannabis, and other substances, as well as data about their mental health and other social factors. The data shows some promising trends: overall, substance use and misuse is trending downward for most groups. However, there are some notable concerns. Here are a few highlights:



ALCOHOL

- In 2023, 24% of high school girls reported drinking alcohol at least once during the past 30 days. This is down from 35% in 2013.
- In 2023, 20% of boys reported drinking alcohol at least once during the past 30 days. This is down from 34% in 2013.
- All races experienced decreased alcohol drinking in the past 10 years overall. However, alcohol drinking *increased* for black students in the past 2 years (2021-2023).
- LGBTQ+ students were more likely than cisgender and heterosexual students to currently drink alcohol.

CANNABIS

- In 2023, 17% of high school students used cannabis during the past 30 days.
- The percentage of students who used cannabis has dropped over the past 10 years; however, it did not change between 2021-2023.
- Female students were more likely than male students to currently use cannabis.
- LGBTQ+ students were more likely than cisgender and heterosexual students to currently use cannabis. In fact, 1 out of every 4 LGBTQ+ students reported using cannabis during the last 30 days.



Inside: *Holiday Poisoning Alert!*



PRESCRIPTION OPIOID MISUSE

- In 2023, 12% of high school students had ever misused prescription opioids. “Misuse” is defined as taking prescription pain medicine without a doctor’s prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it.
- Female students were more likely than male students to have ever misused prescription opioids.
- LGBTQ+ students were more likely than cisgender and heterosexual students to currently misuse prescription opioids.
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students were more likely than all other races to currently misuse prescription opioids.



ILLICIT DRUGS

- *Illicit drugs* are defined as cocaine, inhalants, heroin, methamphetamines, hallucinogens, or ecstasy.
- In 2023 10% of high school students had ever used certain illicit drugs. However, the percent of students who had ever used select illicit drugs decreased overall in the past 10 years.
- American Indian or Alaska Native students were more likely than all other races to use illicit drugs.



TOBACCO & VAPE PRODUCTS



A separate report from the CDC; the [Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey](#); found that student’s use of tobacco and vape products is declining.

Mental Health and Substance Misuse

While the dropping rates of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use/misuse from this single study are encouraging, there is still work to do. Thousands of students are harmed by these substances every year. Furthermore, the YBRS report uncovered evidence of the worsening mental health of students. An increased number of students reported feelings of isolation, sadness, and suicidal thoughts. The number of students who experienced violence and racism also increased.

Why is this significant? The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [reports that](#):

- Substance use problems occur more frequently with certain mental health problems.
- Symptoms of substance use disorders may include, among other changes, drop in attendance and performance at school.

POISON TRIVIA

True or False?

You should always wash your turkey before cooking.



Answer on page 4

Next page: *What Works?*

What works?

In response to the concerns about students' mental health, the CDC developed an action guide with strategies for schools. [What Works in Schools](#) can help schools build on what they are already doing to promote students' mental health and find new strategies to fill in gaps.



Holiday Poisoning Alert: Many Toys Contain Dangerous “Button” Batteries



Button batteries, also known as disk batteries or coin batteries, are common in toys and electronic games which light up, move, or make noise. They can also be found in ornaments, musical greeting cards, remote control devices, key fobs, hearing aids, and more. Young children are attracted to the shiny, coin-shaped batteries and may put them into the mouth, ear or nose. This can cause chemical burns to the surrounding tissues within as little as 2 hours.

U.S. poison centers have reported more than 23,500 button battery exposures since 2019. More than half of all calls are about children under age 6. Over 900 of these exposures resulted in moderate to severe injuries, often requiring hospitalization and even surgery. Sadly, since 2019 there have been more than 20 deaths from button battery exposures.

Protect the young children in your home with these **button battery safety tips**:

- **Avoid** allowing children under age 6 to play with toys or gadgets that use button batteries, especially if the devices have removable battery compartment panels. By law, these battery compartments are required to be accessible only with a screwdriver or similar tool. But that is not always enough to prevent children from opening them.
- **Keep batteries** in their packaging until needed, and store these packages UP & AWAY out of the reach and sight of children. By law, button batteries must be sold in child-resistant packaging. This is good, but the packaging alone is not enough to prevent children from getting their hands on them.
- Used batteries may still be able to cause harm. **Take them** to a battery recycling center if possible. If this is not possible, fold 2 pieces of tape around each battery before putting into the trash when children are not watching.
- Before placing musical greeting cards into the trash can, tear them open and remove the button battery inside. Then either take it to a recycling facility or tape it twice before tossing into the household trash.



- Alert family members who wear hearing aids to the importance of keeping the batteries out of reach of small children at all times. Give them a place to keep their new and used batteries which is up and away—out of the sight and reach of children.

CAN WE MAKE BATTERIES TASTE BAD?

Most battery manufacturers are now making products with a bitter coating, designed to prevent children from swallowing them. While it is a great idea to choose these products if children are present in your home, do not rely on the bitter coating alone to keep them safe. Many children will put bad tasting products in their mouths and swallow them anyway.



This button battery burned this hot dog in less than 2 hours. The same injury could happen to a child’s throat.

WHO CAN HELP?

If you suspect someone has swallowed a button battery, or inserted one into the nose or ear, call the Blue Ridge Poison Center right away. Do not wait for any symptoms, do not give any food or drink, and do not make the person vomit. Follow the Poison Center Specialist’s instructions, which may include going to the nearest emergency medical facility for an x-ray. It is extremely important to make sure the battery is not stuck in the throat or esophagus. The Blue Ridge Poison Center is open 24 hours a day, every day -- even on holidays. 1-800-222-1222.

Poison Trivia Answer: False. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, juices that splash while washing raw meat or poultry can transfer germs onto the surfaces of your kitchen, other food, and utensils. This can make people sick. Wash your hands...not your turkey.



For more holiday poisoning trivia, play our [quiz game!](#)



On September 26, 2024, President Biden signed the *Poison Control Centers (PCC) Reauthorization Act of 2024*, passing the act into law ([Public Law No: 118-86](#)). The act reauthorizes the Poison Help line (1-800-222-1222), supports a national media campaign to educate the public and healthcare providers about the Poison Help line and poison prevention resources, and continues a critical grant program to support the ability of poison control centers to provide services. The *PCC Reauthorization Act of 2024* reauthorizes the poison center network through 2029.

The [Blue Ridge Poison Center](#) is affiliated with University of Virginia Health. Other funding sources include the Virginia Department of Health and HRSA. We are accredited by America’s Poison Centers. Proudly serving the Commonwealth since 1978. [Join the mailing list](#) to receive this quarterly newsletter.

