

Fewer US teens abusing alcohol, prescription meds: survey

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Rate of smoking has also dropped dramatically over time, data shows.

(HealthDay)—There's good news from a new U.S. government report: The percentage of people ages 12 to 17 who smoke, drink or abuse certain drugs is falling.

The findings come from 2014 survey data released Thursday by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The annual government survey involves about 67,500 Americans aged 12 and older.

According to the survey, the rate at which kids between 12 and 17 said they had drunk alcohol over the prior month has fallen from 17.6 percent in 2002 to 11.5 percent by 2014.

Illicit abuse of prescription narcotic painkillers—drugs such as OxyContin and Vicodin—has also been a big concern over the past few

years. However, the SAMHSA study found that while 3.2 percent of teens said they had abused the meds in 2002, the rate had fallen to 1.9 percent by 2014.

Rates of smoking and other tobacco use are dropping precipitously as well, from 15.2 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds in 2002 to just 7 percent by 2014, according to the new report.

"The data released today show some signs of progress," Michael Botticelli, the White House's Director of National Drug Control Policy, said in a SAMHSA news release. "However, we still have significant challenges to address."

That's because other statistics aren't budging, or are getting worse. For example, more teens are using marijuana. The number is up from 9.4 percent of kids aged 12 to 17 in 2013, to 10.2 percent a year later, the report found. In a statement, SAMHSA attributed the rise, in part, to "the increase in adult marijuana use."

Even more troubling, the new report found that the rate at which teens under 18 used heroin rose from 0.1 percent in 2013 to 0.2 percent in 2014.

Despite these trends, Botticelli stressed that there are proven ways to turn these numbers around.

"We know that evidence-based prevention efforts are the most effective way to reduce drug use and to support the roughly 90 percent of American youth who do not use illicit drugs," he said.

More information: For more on helping teens avoid substance abuse, head to the [U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse](#).

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