



Changes In Marijuana And Vaping Habits Among Youth

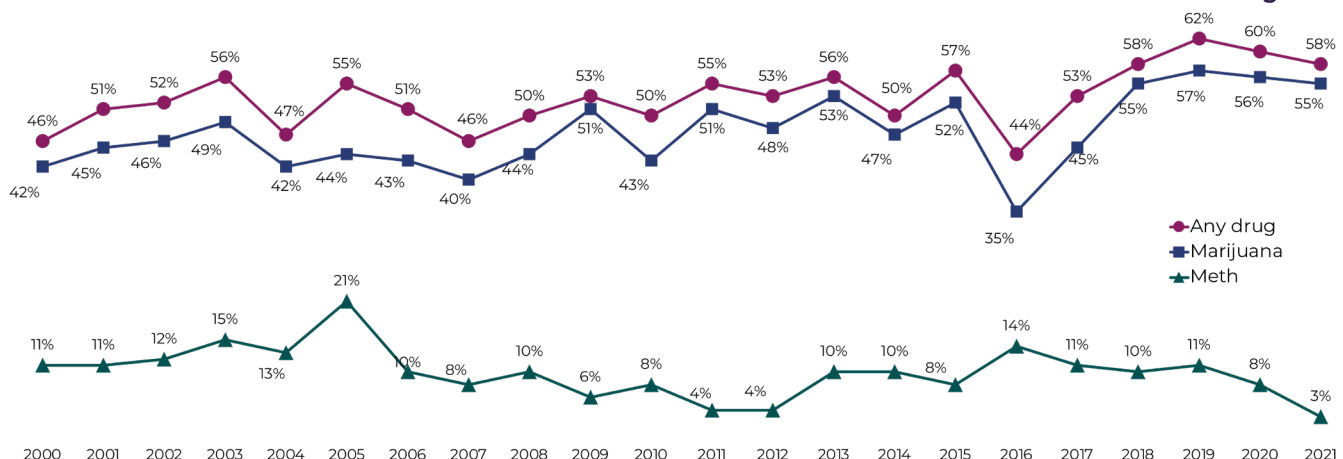
As part of the SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, adults and youth are interviewed in local detention facilities within 48 hours of being booked. In addition to answering confidential and anonymous questions regarding their drug use history and other risk factors, a voluntary urine sample that cannot be tied back to any individual is also requested which enables the compilation of regional drug use trends over time. As the number of youth booked into Juvenile Hall has decreased in recent years, additional youth were interviewed at San Diego Achievement Centers starting in 2021.¹ Following the release of data from the youth interviews that were conducted in 2021, this CJ Flash highlights some of the key findings from the most recent [Juvenile Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region](#).

Highlight 1

About three in every five youth interviewed in detention in Juvenile Hall in 2021 tested positive for at least one substance, a slight decrease from the previous year. Marijuana remains the drug of choice for youth with over half (55%) positive at the time of booking (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Almost Three in Five Youth Interviewed in Juvenile Hall in 2021 Tested Positive for at Least One Drug



SOURCE: SANDAG, 2022

Highlight 2

While almost all youth have tried at least one of the three “gateway” drugs², there is a very different pattern for marijuana use (compared to alcohol and tobacco) among the youth interviewed in 2021. As Table 1 shows, marijuana is now the first substance used by most youth and on average, it is tried for the first time around the age of 12. For those who ever used it, the greatest percentage reported using it in the past 30 days (compared to alcohol and tobacco), and they used it with the greatest frequency. Marijuana was also the substance most often described as “very easy” or “easy” to obtain and was considered to be the drug that would cause the least amount of harm to a user. With marijuana being more potent than ever,³ and juveniles’ brains still developing, this early and frequent use among San Diego youth is a concern.

¹Achievement Centers were launched by the County of San Diego in Fiscal Year 2020. The purpose of Achievement Centers is to provide at-risk youth and youth on probation after-school programming that provides opportunities to engage in prosocial and rehabilitation services in the community and divert them from detention. In 2021, SANDAG interviewed 15 youth at San Diego Achievement Centers, but urine samples were not collected.

²Gateway drugs included tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. While all individuals who try these substances continue to use other drugs, it has been shown that most individuals begin experimenting with one of these three substances.

³Freeman, T. P., Craft, S., Wilson, J., Stylianou, S., ElSohly, M., Di Forti, M., and Lynskey, M. T. (2021) Changes in delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD) concentrations in cannabis over time: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Addiction*, 116: 1000–1010. <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.15253>



Table 1
Pattern of Marijuana Use Different than Other Gateway Drugs for Youth Interviewed in 2021

	Marijuana	Alcohol	Tobacco
Percent that ever tried	89%	91%	64%
First substance tried	74%	16%	10%
Average (mean) age 1st use	12.5	13.1	13.0
Used past 30 days (if tried)	63%	34%	46%
Average (mean) days used past 30	18.2	6.3	16.6
"Very easy" or "easy" to obtain	88%	74%	86%
Perceives substance as bad or very bad for users	11%	49%	61%

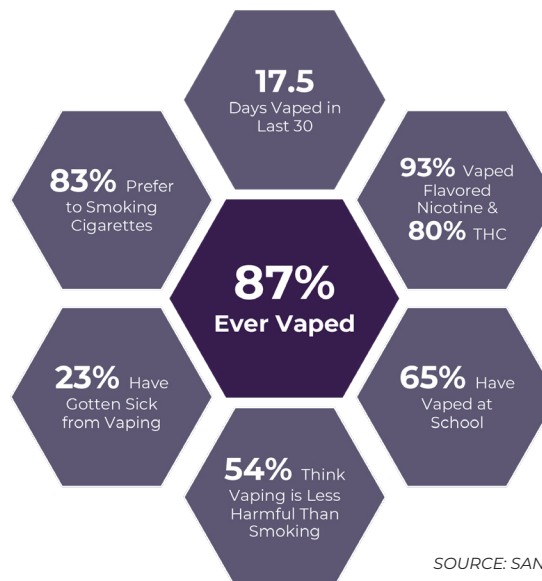
SOURCE: SANDAG, 2022

Highlight 3

As the use of e-cigarettes and flavored nicotine products continues to increase nationwide,⁴ almost all youth interviewed in 2021 said they had ever vaped. Most often the youth reported vaping flavored nicotine, but also THC. As Figure 2 shows, youth vaped more than every other day in an average month and, also reported using it on school campus. Almost all youth said they preferred vaping to smoking cigarettes and more than half thought vaping was less harmful than smoking cigarettes. When youth were asked where they got their vaping devices, 65% said their friends, 25% a store, and 6% online (not shown).

Figure 2

Almost all Youth Interviewed in 2021 Report They Have Vaped



SOURCE: SANDAG, 2022

⁴<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p1007-e-cigarette-use.html>

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