

What about young people and illicit drugs?

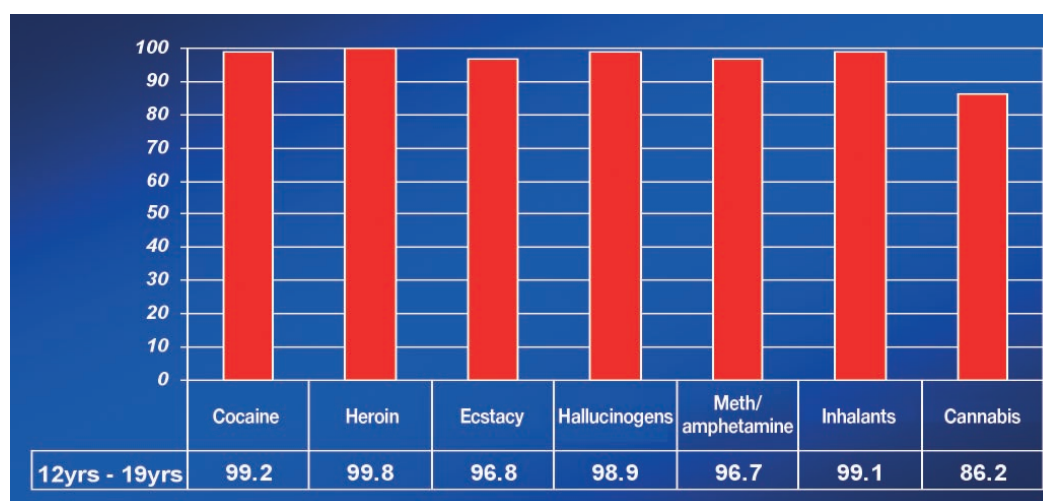
This fact sheet provides information about illicit drugs and is not about the more commonly used legal drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and medicines.

With all the horror stories about drugs in the media, many parents wonder why young people would even think of trying drugs. Unfortunately the way the media often frames the drug debate makes it seem like many young people are involved in such activity when the fact is that most young people haven't tried illicit drugs and never will.

Here are the figures from the 2004 National Drug Household Survey which show the number of 12-19 year olds who have **not** used a range of illicit drugs in the past 12 months.

No Recent Illicit Drug Use – 12-19 year olds

2004 National Drug Household Survey



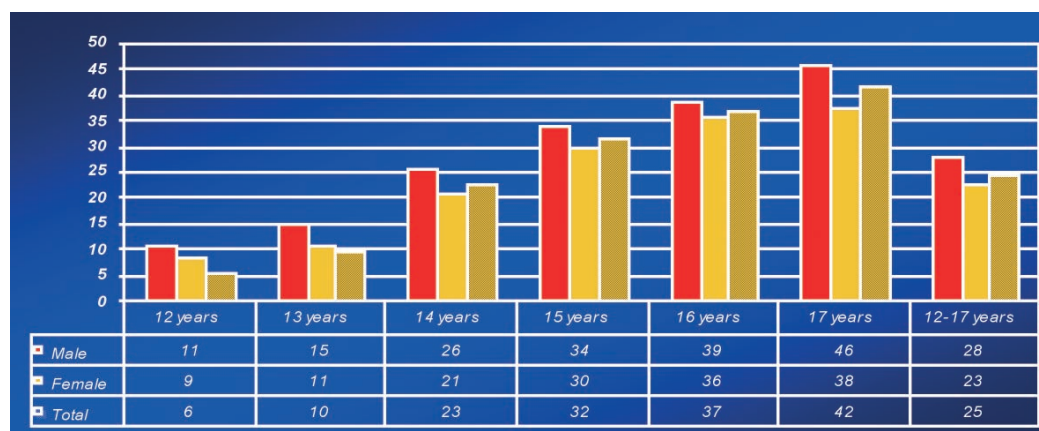
These figures quite clearly show that the vast majority of our teenagers in Australia **have not used illicit drugs recently**. Even cannabis, the most popular illicit drug, has not been used by 86% of teenagers.

Of course, this does not mean that some young people are not going to experiment. They may try a drug, particularly cannabis, a few times through adolescence or in their 20s and then never use again. Experimental use does not mean 'safe use' and things can go wrong when a young person uses any substance, whether it be legal, illegal or pharmaceutical. However, regular use over a period of time is of much more concern.

Very few teenagers use drugs regularly. Cannabis is the exception, with a small number experimenting with the substance and continuing to use over a period of years.

Lifetime Cannabis Use – Secondary Students

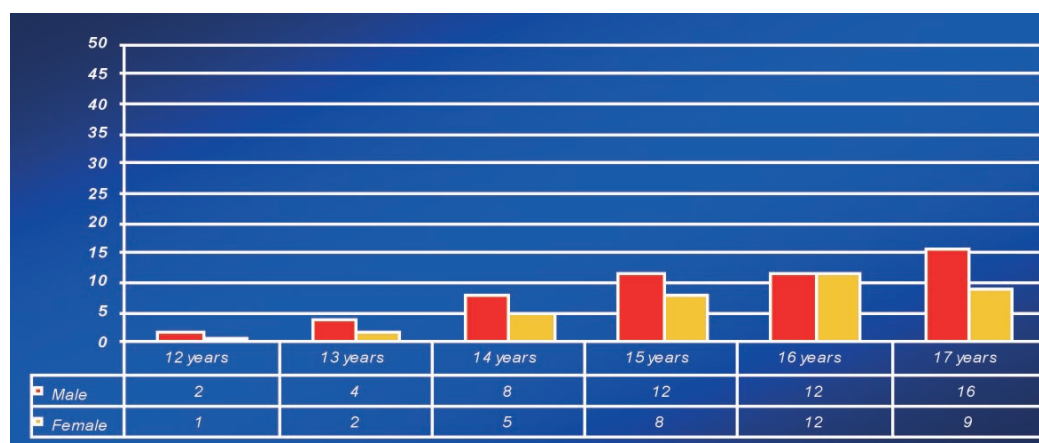
2002 Australian School Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey



The Australian School Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey shows that a considerable number of Australian secondary students have tried cannabis in their lifetime. However, this does not mean that these students continue to use the drug or that they have used it more than once. Although these are the figures that are usually quoted in the media it is much more important to look at figures which give us a better indication of regular use. When students are asked if they have used cannabis 10 or more times in the previous year, one can see that a far smaller number are involved in that type of activity.

Secondary Students Using Cannabis 10 or More Times in the Past Year

2002 Australian School Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey



Although drug use is risky and we should try to prevent young people from using drugs, we need to remember that just because a teenager is experimenting, or is exposed to drugs, this does not necessarily mean that they are or will become drug dependent. The vast majority of young people who do experiment quickly find that it is not for them and move away from it of their own accord. Sometimes, however, drug experimentation and use are part of a much larger problem, like not fitting in at school, difficulties at home, not knowing how to relate to others around them, etc. Unfortunately there are also teenagers who use drugs to shut out the world and numb pain. Parents who are worried about their teenager and their alcohol or other drug use should seek professional help.