

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

CESAR Study Finds 9 Warning Signs of Early Marijuana Use Among Maryland's Public School Students

Nine behaviors and attitudes differentiate students who used marijuana before age 15 from those who had not, according to an analysis of data from the 2002 Maryland Adolescent Survey (MAS). Overall, one-fifth of Maryland 12th grade students reported using marijuana before age 15. A scale of 9 warning signs of early marijuana use among 12th graders was developed from an analysis of the MAS data (see below). The scale also detected early use among 8th and 10th graders. The more warning signs a student had, the more likely he or she was to have used marijuana early (see Figure 1). For example, approximately three-fourths of 12th graders with 6 or more warning signs were early marijuana users, compared to 3% of 12th graders with no warning signs. Students with more warning signs also reported using a greater number of other illegal drugs* and experiencing a greater number of serious problems resulting from drug and alcohol use** (see Figure 2). The report, "Warning Signs for Early Marijuana Users Among Maryland's Public School Students," discusses the implications of these findings for intervening with youth and implementing prevention programs. Complimentary copies of the report can be ordered by contacting CESAR at cesar@cesar.umd.edu or 301-405-9770.

The 9 Warning Signs for Early Marijuana Use

Behaviors

- Cigarette use before age 15
- Alcohol use before age 15
- 20 or more unexcused absences
- Drug arrest
- Alcohol arrest

Attitudes/Opinions

- Smoking marijuana is safe
- Smoking cigarettes is safe
- My parents think it's okay to smoke marijuana
- My parents think it's okay to smoke cigarettes

Figure 1: Percentage of Maryland 12th Grade Students Reporting Marijuana Use Before Age 15

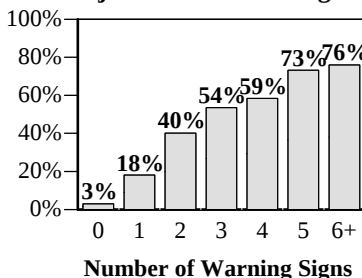
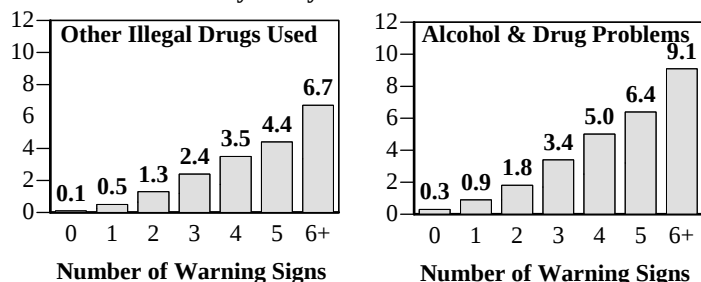


Figure 2: Mean Number of Other Illegal Drugs* Used in Lifetime and Alcohol and Drug Problems by Maryland 12th Graders**



*Other illegal drugs were inhalants, nitrates, crack, cocaine, LSD, PCP, other hallucinogens, methamphetamines, designer drugs, heroin, amphetamines, barbiturates, narcotics, and Ritalin®.

**Alcohol and drug problems were school absences, health problems, family problems, being high/drunken at school, poor school performance, inability to stop using drugs/alcohol, and driving while under the influence of alcohol/drugs.

SOURCE: Maryland Drug Early Warning System (DEWS), CESAR, "Warning Signs for Early Marijuana Users Among Maryland's Public School Students," *DEWS Investigates*, June 2004. For more information, contact Dr. Eric Wish at ewish@cesar.umd.edu.

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