

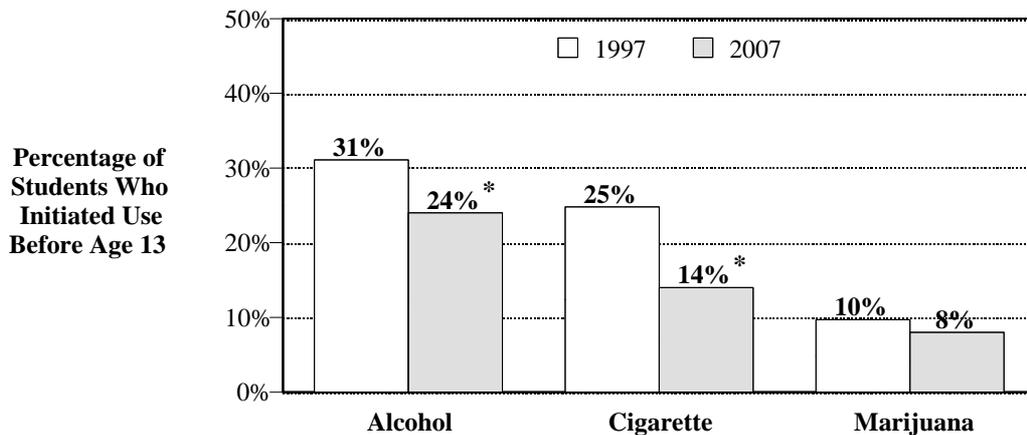
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Youths Less Likely to Try Alcohol and Cigarettes Before Age 13 Now Than 10 Years Ago; Prevalence of Early Marijuana Initiation Has Not Changed

The percentage of high school students who first tried alcohol or cigarettes before the age of 13 has declined considerably over the last decade, according to recently released data from the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). In 1997, 31% of high school students reported drinking more than a few sips of alcohol before age 13, compared to 24% in 2007. The percentage reporting smoking a whole cigarette for the first time before age 13 also declined, from 25% in 1997 to 14% in 2007. Marijuana initiation before age 13, however, did not change significantly over the same period (see figure below). While the declines in early alcohol and tobacco use are encouraging, nearly one-fourth (24%) of high school students begin drinking before age 13. Previous research has shown a relationship between early alcohol initiation and alcohol abuse/dependence as well as illicit drug use (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 17, Issue 26 and *CESAR FAX*, Volume 13, Issue 45; available online at www.cesar.umd.edu).

**Percentage of High School Students Who Tried[†]
Alcohol, Cigarettes, or Marijuana for the First Time Before Age 13, 1997 and 2007**



[†]Tried a cigarette is defined as smoking a whole cigarette. Tried alcohol is defined as drinking more than a few sips of alcohol.

*p < 0.01

NOTE: The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) survey uses a three-stage cluster sample design to produce a nationally representative sample of public and private school students in grades 9 to 12.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 57 (SS-4), June 6, 2008. Available online at http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/pdf/yrbs07_mmwr.pdf.

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