Colorado high schoolers use alcohol at a higher rate than any other substance. Nearly six of 10 (59 percent) report ever trying alcohol, closely mirroring the national rate. Alcohol is also the easiest substance for Colorado youth to obtain.

**Rate of Alcohol Use:**

One of three high school students report currently drinking alcohol, a rate that didn’t change from 2013 to 2015. Colorado youth are near the national average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colorado</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68.0% 18- to 25-year-olds use (2015)

**Binge Drinking:**

One of six high school students report binge drinking in the last 30 days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colorado</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Access:**

58.6 Percent

Nearly three of five high schoolers believe it is easy to get alcohol if they wanted.

18.2 Percent

Nearly one of five report trying alcohol before age 13.

1,623 liquor stores in Colorado (28.7 per 100,000 residents)

**Colorado Youth: Who’s Most Likely to Use Alcohol?**

Four of 10 (40 percent) high school students in the Interstate 70 mountain counties of Eagle, Garfield, Grand, Pitkin and Summit say they’ve had at least one drink in the past month, the state's highest rate of alcohol use. The second highest rate is reported by high schoolers in the counties of Boulder and Broomfield at 38 percent.

**Current Alcohol Use by Grade:**

Two of five seniors regularly drink

Current alcohol use steadily increases by grade, with an apparent jump between 8th and 10th grade.

**Perception of Risk**

Seven of 10 (69.9 percent) high schoolers believe that regularly drinking alcohol is risky to their health compared with 48.8 percent when it comes to marijuana. But even though high school students think it’s riskier to drink alcohol than smoke marijuana, they still drink at a much higher rate.
COLORADO YOUTH: WHO’S MOST LIKELY TO USE MARIJUANA?

High school students on the Western Slope and in southwest Colorado had higher rates of use than those on the Eastern Plains. Pueblo County has the state’s highest rate — 30.1 percent.

ACCESS

Top Five Colorado Counties: Rate of recreational and medical marijuana shops.

State average: 12.7 per 100,000

1. Costilla 118.6 (4 shops)
2. Gunnison 110.3 (11 shops)
3. Pitkin 107.2 (16 shops)
4. Routt 66.4 (4 shops)
5. La Plata 37.0 (12 shops)

(Note: Excludes counties with 0, 1 or 2 shops)

FIRST USE OF MARIJUANA: NEARLY HALF BY AGE 14

More than 40 percent of high school seniors who say they have ever used marijuana had tried it by the age of 14.

PERCESSION OF RISK

Percentage of kids who think regular use is risky:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 or older</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Percent

of adults with children under 15 had marijuana products in or around their home.

16,000 Homes

Had children under 15 with possible exposure to secondhand marijuana smoke or vapor.

6 Percent

New mothers who used marijuana during pregnancy.

Colorado Health Institute
Tobacco

The earlier someone starts smoking cigarettes, the less likely they are to quit. In Colorado, 8.6 percent of high school students smoke cigarettes, slightly lower than the nationwide rate of 10.8 percent. The good news is Colorado’s rate is less than half of what it was 10 years ago. But nearly one of three (30.3 percent) of Colorado high schoolers say they currently use some form of tobacco, either cigarettes, electronic cigarettes, cigars or smokeless tobacco.

Rate of Cigarette Use:
Fewer high school students are smoking cigarettes in Colorado and nationally. Rates have more than halved in the last decade in Colorado and nationally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colorado</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rate of Any Tobacco Use:
While the rate of current cigarette smoking is at a historic low, nearly one in three high school students in Colorado used a tobacco product in the last month, a trend mirrored nationally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colorado</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access
More than half of high school students (57 percent) say it’s easy to get cigarettes. The state’s highest rate of high school students who say it’s easy to get cigarettes is in the Upper Arkansas Valley counties of Lake, Chaffee, Fremont and Custer, where it’s 71.3 percent. This region reports both highest use of cigarettes and the highest ease of access to cigarettes.

71.3% of high school students in the Upper Arkansas Valley say it’s easy to get cigarettes.

Perception of Risk
The majority of high school students (84.3 percent) think smoking is risky, but this still means that 15.7 percent don’t think frequent cigarette smokers risk harming themselves. That percentage is holding steady.
The rate of heroin use among high schoolers remains at a steady two percent — on par with the national average. But expanding the age group to include all Coloradans, beginning with 12-year-olds, reveals that the rate of heroin use is increasing rapidly while the rate of prescription opioid use has leveled off. The same trends are seen in overdose death rates. Heroin overdose death rates are skyrocketing in Colorado even as prescription opioid death rates level off, perhaps a sign of progress in the battle against the misuse of prescription drugs.

**Rate of Youth Heroin Use:**
Two percent of high school students in Colorado report using heroin at least once — a slight decrease from 2013. Pueblo leads the state at 6.3 percent with Denver second at 4.8 percent, both higher than the state average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colorado</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013: 2.7%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015: 2.2%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Heroin Use Rising, Prescription Opioid Use Steady:**
The rate of heroin use among Coloradans 12 and older quintupled from 20 per 100,000 Coloradans in 2003 to 100 per 100,000 Coloradans in 2014. However, the rate of prescription opioid use (pain relievers) has stayed relatively steady since 2007 at about 450 per 100,000 Coloradans in 2014.

80% of heroin users reportedly started their opioid use with prescription pain relievers.

**Fentanyl Overdose Rate:**

1999: 0.1 per 100,000
2016: 0.9 per 100,000

**Access to Prescription Opioids:**
Prescribing Rates Highest in Southeast Colorado, Pueblo.
Colorado averages 76.2 opioid prescriptions for each 100 Coloradans. Counties in southeastern Colorado including Costilla, Huerfano, Las Animas, Pueblo and Otero all have opioid prescribing rates of more than 111 prescriptions per 100 people. Costilla County recorded 150 prescriptions per 100 residents, nearly double the state average.

**Heroin Overdose Deaths Climbing, Prescription Opioid Deaths Leveling Off**
Colorado has seen a slight downtick in the rate of prescription opioid-related overdose deaths, which stood at 5.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2016. However, the rate of heroin overdose deaths is on the rise — more than quadrupling between 2010 and 2016, when they reached 4.1 per 100,000. Heroin overdose deaths account for 25 percent of all drug poisoning deaths in 2016, up from 18 percent in 2015.

**Opioid Overdose Death Rates per 100,000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Drug Poisoning Deaths</th>
<th>Prescription Drug Deaths</th>
<th>Heroin Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ILLICIT SUBSTANCES

Colorado is about average nationally when it comes to the use of cocaine, methamphetamines, ecstasy, prescription drugs and other illicit substances by high schoolers. Still, some regions of the state are seeing significantly higher rates of high school use. And, disturbingly, overdose deaths are rising among all ages.

Rate of Illicit Substance Use: Little Change From 2013 To 2015

Illicit drug use is on par with the national averages. Nonmedical prescription drugs are the illicit substance the state’s high schoolers are most likely to use, with nearly one of seven reporting use at least once in their lives.

Youth Access to Drugs: Bigger Problem in Some Regions

The question: How easy is it to get cocaine, LSD, methamphetamines and other illicit drugs? The answer: It’s easiest for high schoolers in the Upper Arkansas Valley counties of Custer, Fremont, Chaffee, Park, Lake, Clear Creek and Gilpin. One of five high schoolers there report that it’s easy to obtain illicit drugs. Students there also report the state’s the highest use of illicit drugs.

Illicit Drug Overdose Rates, per 100,000 (All Ages)

Among illicit drugs, methamphetamines contribute to Colorado’s highest overdose rate for all ages. The rate increased fivefold between 2010 and 2016 to 3.5 per 100,000 residents. The overdose death rate for benzodiazepines, or tranquilizers, increased to 2.2 per 100,000 in 2016.
SNAPSHOT
RISK FACTORS FOR SUBSTANCE USE
A person’s risk of substance use can be influenced by many factors, including levels of social and emotional support, environmental surroundings, and mental health. Studies show that youth with serious emotional problems are more likely to use substances and become dependent on them. Youth who lack supervision and supportive adults in their life also are more likely to use substances. These data help to illustrate the differences in risk factors across Colorado that may influence susceptibility to substance use among youth.

High-Need Areas
Pueblo County and the Upper Arkansas Valley counties rank among the state’s worst regions for youth reporting difficulty with emotions; feeling sad or hopeless; having an adult to talk to; teacher encouragement; and school dropout rates.

Poverty and Violent Crime
Studies show that poverty and violent crime are associated with higher rates of substance use. Studies also show that impoverished neighborhoods tend to have higher rates of violent crime. Counties in the southeast area of the state have the highest percentage of households under the federal poverty level. In Crowley County, for example, nearly one of four households (23.5 percent) is in poverty. That’s more than twice the state average of 11 percent. Violent crime, meanwhile, is highest in the city of Pueblo, with 9.8 violent crimes per 1,000 people, more than double the state average of 4.4 per 1,000. Denver comes in second with 6.6 violent crimes per 1,000 people. Six of the cities with the highest violent crime rates are in the Denver Metro Area.

Dropout Rates
Students who have dropped out of school have an elevated risk of substance use. Lake and Fremont counties, both in the Upper Arkansas Valley, share the state’s highest dropout rate of 3.3 percent for students of any age.

State average: 2.3 percent
1. Lake 3.3 percent
2. Fremont 3.3 percent
3. San Juan 3.2 percent
4. Montezuma 2.9 percent
5. Saguache 2.8 percent

Social and Emotional Support
Nearly two out of five
Pueblo County high school students lack a supportive adult to go to with a serious problem.

Having a supportive adult and a supportive school and home environment can reduce the risk of substance use for adolescents.

Less than half of students in Pueblo County think their teachers encourage and care about them. Similarly, the number for the Upper Arkansas Valley is 53.5 percent. Both are below the state average of 60.9 percent.
K-12 Drug, Alcohol, Marijuana and Tobacco Suspensions

In the 2016-2017 school year, marijuana was the substance that resulted in the most suspensions at 3,147—a noticeable increase from the previous year. Alcohol- and tobacco-related suspensions remained steady, while illicit drugs (other than marijuana) saw a decline from 1,579 suspensions to 1,006.

Mental Health

Students who suffer from mental health issues are at greater risk for substance use. Mesa and Pueblo counties, along with counties in the southeast corner and the Upper Arkansas Valley, report the highest rates of children with emotional difficulties and high school students who were sad or hopeless for at least two weeks in a row in the past year.

High Schoolers Who Felt Sad or Hopeless Almost Every Day for Two Weeks or More in a Row

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mesa County</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pueblo County</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake, Fremont, Chaffee, Custer</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highest Rates in the State

- HSR 19 (Mesa) 37.8%
- HSR 7 (Pueblo) 34.5%
- HSR 13 (Lake, Fremont, Chaffee, Custer) 34.2%
- Statewide 29.5%

Difficulty with Emotions

Nearly one of three youth between ages one and 14 in Southeast Colorado counties have difficulties with emotions, concentration, or getting along with other people (31.7 percent). Those in the Upper Arkansas Valley rank second at about one of four (23.9 percent.) The statewide number is one of five (19.2 percent).

More Youth Reporting Symptoms of Depression

The percentage of students who reported that they felt sad or hopeless every day for two weeks or more in the last year increased by about five percentage points to 29.5 percent in 2015 from 24.3 percent in 2013. This compares with the national rate, which stayed the same between 2013 and 2015 at 29.9 percent.

About four of 10 (37.8 percent) high school students in Mesa County say they felt sad or hopeless every day for two weeks or more, the state's highest rate. The next highest rates are reported by high schoolers in Pueblo County (34.5 percent) and the Upper Arkansas Valley (34.2 percent).