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# **Provincial Student Drug Use Survey: Highlights 1998**

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**To obtain additional copies, please contact:**

Provincial Epidemiology Service  
New Brunswick Health and Community Services  
PO Box 5100  
Fredericton, New Brunswick  
E3B 5G8

Telephone: (506) 453-3092  
Fax: (506) 453-2780

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## **Investigators:**

**Dr. Alberto Barceló**

**Varsha Chhatre**

Provincial Epidemiology Service

Department of Health and Community Services

**Bob Jones**

Hospital Services

Department of Health and Community Services

**Dr. Cary Grobe**

Department of Education

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## Collaborators in the Atlantic Provinces

### **Newfoundland And Labrador**

Carol Ann MacDonald  
Addiction Services  
Department of Health  
1st Floor, Confederation Building  
PO Box 8700  
St. John's, NF  
A1B 4J6

### **Nova Scotia**

Christiane Poulin  
Department of Community Health &  
Epidemiology  
Dalhousie University  
Halifax, NS  
B3H 4H7

Jim Baker  
Strategic Health Services  
Nova Scotia Department of Health  
PO Box 488  
Halifax, NS  
B3J 2R8

### **Prince Edward Island**

Linda Van Til  
Department of Health and Social Services  
PO Box 2000  
Charlottetown, PEI  
C1A 7N8

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*“People should not be so concerned with pot and hashish. The concern is with LSD and cocaine. From my own experiences, that is what I would like to tell kids, to stay away from those. Pot is not a bad thing, just illegal.”*

*Female, Grade 12, Age 18*

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We thank Linda Duffett-Leger who implemented the survey in New Brunswick. Thanks are extended to staff from the New Brunswick Department of Health and Community Services and the Department of Education for helping implement the survey.

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*"I think that "Awareness" is really the only way to improve drug education. If people educate others on the availability of drugs and teach them the consequences, it could really make a difference".*

*Female, Grade 9, Age 14*

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## **Introduction**

The Provincial Epidemiology Service implemented the fifth Student Drug Use Survey in April of 1998. Previous surveys were carried out in 1986, 1989, 1992 and 1996. Survey results indicated an increase in most drug use between 1992 to 1996. In addition, drug use among NB students was found to be comparable to those students living in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. As was the case in 1996, the 1998 survey was a collaborative effort involving the four Atlantic Provinces.

Students from grades 7, 9, 10 & 12 were asked a series of questions regarding their use of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other legal and illicit drugs.

The New Brunswick Student Drug Use Survey Highlight Report includes key findings of student drug use in New Brunswick as well as in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. More details about the method, sampling questionnaire and results of the New Brunswick Student Drug Use Survey will be available in the Technical Report.

## **Goals and Objectives**

The goals of the 1998 Student Drug Use survey in the Atlantic Provinces were:

- To obtain valid and relevant epidemiological information about the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs by adolescent students; and
- To develop and enhance the understanding of the nature of adolescent alcohol, tobacco or other drug use in each province separately and in the region as a whole.

The objectives were:

- To estimate the prevalence and patterns of use for alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, among adolescent students;

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- To identify risk factors associated with the use of these substances among adolescent students;
  - To identify some of the high risk behaviours and harmful consequences associated with that use.
  - To determine students' awareness of exposure to drug prevention/education programming during the school year;
  - To provide students with the opportunity to identify issues and needs they consider relevant to alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; and
  - To provide sound epidemiological data useful in the development of policies and programming in the areas of prevention and treatment.

## **Questionnaire**

The 1998 student drug use surveys employed a self-completed drug use questionnaire. Students indicated their responses directly on the computer-scannable questionnaire. Based on previous experience, the 1996 SDUS questionnaire was modified and used for the 1998 survey.

## **Sampling Frame and Technique**

The New Brunswick Student Drug Use 1998 survey was a province-wide survey of students in the public school system in grades 7, 9, 10, and 12 (spanning from 11 to 19 years of age). Students attending private school, street youth, dropouts and adolescents absent from school on the day of the survey were not included in the sampling frame. The present study on drug use and associated risk behaviours among New Brunswick students is based on a sample of 3,295 students from grades 7, 9, 10 and 12.

## **Definition of Use**

In Table 1, "use" of cigarettes refers to smoking more than one cigarette in the 12 months prior to the survey. Alcohol "use" refers to alcohol used in the 12 months prior to the survey, ranging from less often than once/month to daily use. For all other drugs, "use" refers to use on one or more occasions during the 12 months prior to the survey.



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*"These are growing concerns in our society. I am aware of many individuals who began using drugs very young. We must stop the problem in youngsters before it begins."*

*Male, Grade 12, Age 18*

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## **Highlights – New Brunswick 1998**

### **Characteristics of students**

- The total number of students in the survey sample was 3,295.
- The sample consisted of an equal number of males (49.5%) and females (50.0%).
- Participants in the sample ranged in age between 12 and 19 years, however, the majority (84.6%) were between the ages of 13 and 18 years.
- The majority (72.6%) lived in homes with both parents present.
- Overall, 80.5% of participants had a grade point average of 60% or higher.
- There was fairly equal representation of grades 7 and 9 (28% and 27.8%) as well as from grades 10 and 12 students (22.2% and 22.0%).

### **Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Use**

- As occurred in previous surveys, alcohol, tobacco and cannabis were the most frequently used drugs reported in New Brunswick.
- In 1998, 55.5% of students reported the use of alcohol during the year prior to the survey. The reported percentage of alcohol use in 1996 was 52.1%.
- The frequency of tobacco use decreased slightly from 32.9% in 1996 to 32.4% in 1998.
- Overall, 30.8% of students reported the use of cannabis in 1998. The reported use was 29.0% in 1996.

**Table 1**  
**Alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, 1996 and 1998**

<b>Substance</b>	<b>1996 (%) (n=3352)</b>	<b>1998 (%) (n=3295)</b>
Alcohol	52.1	55.5
Tobacco	32.9	32.4
Cannabis	29.0	30.8
LSD*	15.2	11.2
Stimulants, Non-medical use	9.3	8.6
Stimulants, Medical use	3.7	4.9
Psilocybin/Mescaline	8.4	9.3
Inhalants	5.8	5.9
Tranquilizers, Non-medical use	4.6	3.9
Tranquilizers, Medical use	5.3	5.3
Cocaine	4.8	4.2
Steroids	2.8	2.3
PCP	3.8	3.3
Heroin	2.4	1.8
Barbiturates, Non-medical use*	2.5	1.3
Barbiturates, Medical use	1.3	1.0
None	36.5	35.7

\*p<0.05

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- LSD use decreased from 15.2% in 1996 to 11.2% in 1998.
  - Non-medical use of stimulants decreased from 9.3% in 1996 to 8.6% in 1998, however, medical use of stimulants increased from 3.7% in 1996 to 4.9% in 1998.
  - Psilocybin/Mescaline use increased from 8.4% in 1996 to 9.3% in 1998.
  - The same proportion of students (5.3%) reported medical use of tranquilizers in 1996 and 1998.
  - Cocaine use was reported by 4.2% of students in 1998, a percentage slightly lower than that reported in 1996 (4.8%).
  - Steroid use decreased from 2.8% in 1996 to 2.3% in 1998.
  - PCP use was reported by 3.3% of students in 1998, similarly, its use was reported by 3.8% of students in 1996.
  - Heroin use decreased from 2.4% in 1996 to 1.8% in 1998.
  - Medical use of barbiturates decreased from 2.5% in 1996 to 1.3% in 1998.
  - Non-medical use of barbiturates decreased from 1.3% in 1996 to 1.0% in 1998.
  - The percentage of students who reported no drug use at all remained stable at about 36 % from 1996 to 1998.

## **Drug Use by Gender**

- Over 50% of students reported using alcohol.
- A slightly smaller number of females (55.3%) than males (56.1%) reported alcohol use.
- More females (34.3%) than males (30.6%) reported tobacco use.
- More males (33.4%) than females (28.3%) reported cannabis use.

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- Slightly more males than females reported using stimulants (medical use), while more females than males reported using tranquilizers (non-medical and medical), stimulants (non-medical) and heroin.
  - Although it remained a small percentage of students using steroids, over twice as many males reported usage (males 3.2%, females 1.5%).
  - Psilocybin/mescaline use was reported more in males (10.0%) than in females (8.5%).
  - LSD and PCP use was reported more by males than females while the percentage of those using cocaine or crack was highest among females.
  - The percentage of male and female students who reported using barbiturates (medical and non-medical use), inhalants and heroin was similar.

## **Alcohol and Drug Related Problems**

### Problems experienced:

- In 6 out of 7 categories listed, problems experienced due to the use of alcohol outnumbered problems experienced due to the use of drugs.
- Overall, 4.8% of students felt the use of drugs negatively affected school work/exams while a smaller percentage (2.8%) of students felt that alcohol negatively affected school work/exams.
- Tension with family and friends due to alcohol use was reported by 8.4% of students, whereas 6.7% reported the same problem due to drug use.
- The cost of alcohol prevented more students from buying other things (9.2%) than did the cost of drugs (7.4%).
- Overall, 6.1% of students consumed alcohol before breakfast.
- Causing damage to things (10.3%) and injuring oneself (9.6%) due to alcohol consumption far outnumbered the same problems caused due to drug use (damage 9.6%, injury 3.7%).

**Table 2**  
**Alcohol and Drug Related Problems**

	Alcohol %	Drugs %	Both %
<b>Problems experienced:</b>			
Use affected school work/exams	2.8	4.8	-
Caused tension with family/friends	8.4	6.7	-
Caused trouble with the police	3.1	1.9	-
Cost of ... prevented buying other things	9.2	7.4	-
Consumed alcohol before/instead of breakfast	6.1	-	-
Damaged things due to ...	10.3	3.3	-
Injured oneself as a result of ...	9.6	3.7	-
<b>Student feels she/he needs help:</b>			
Yes	1.9	1.3	1.5
No, I did not feel I needed help	-	-	51.2
<b>Student has used services or received help:</b>			
Yes	0.9	0.9	0.8
No, I have not used services or received help	-	-	52.7

Needed help:

- The majority of students (51.2%) did not feel they needed help, while only a small percentage of students (less than 2% for each category) felt they needed help.

Used services or received help:

- A very small percentage of students had used services or received help (less than 1% for each category).

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*"My only other concern is that the youth of this school, do not realize that their life would be so much easier and better, if they didn't have drugs, alcohol or tobacco in their lives!"*

*Female, Grade 10, Age 15*

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## **Conclusions**

There was a substantial decrease of almost 4% in the use of LSD from 1996 to 1998. Although there was a moderate increase in the use of cannabis, stimulants (medical use) and Psilocybin/mescaline, this increase was not statistically significant. The greatest increase (3.4%) was seen with alcohol use.

Although some students are experiencing personal and school related problems due to drug and alcohol use, the majority of students do not feel they need help. Overall, 4.7 % of students recognized they needed help, yet less than 1% actually used services or received help. Students appear to be reluctant to seek help or may be unable to obtain help when they feel it is needed.

In conclusion, alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco were still the most commonly used drugs by students in New Brunswick. Although drug use among students did not level off during the past two years, prevalence of use for most drugs seems to be stable, when comparing results between the 1996 and 1998 surveys. Alcohol use should be monitored in the near future.

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*"I figure alcohol, not so much drugs, makes you do things which you have to live with and pay for, for the rest of your life. That's why I have chosen to be smart and wait until I'm a little older and just*

*Female, Grade 10, Age 15*

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## **Highlights: Atlantic Provinces 1998**

The results of the 1998 Student Drug Use Surveys conducted throughout the Atlantic Provinces has been compiled (Tables 3) in order to gain an overall view of Atlantic Canada and determine trends in drug use throughout the provinces.

- As in 1996, the most commonly used drugs remained alcohol, tobacco and cannabis.
- The majority (> 50%) of students in grades 7, 9, 10 and 12 reported having consumed alcohol.
- The proportion of adolescents that reported alcohol consumption was similar in the four provinces and was relatively similar to 1996.
- Prince Edward Island had the lowest reported rate of tobacco use (26.5%) of the four Atlantic Provinces. This rate was lower than in 1996.
- Overall, in the Atlantic region, cannabis use has increased from 28.1% in 1996 to 32.5% in 1998. However, the greatest increases were in Newfoundland and Labrador with an increase from 22.8% to 30.2 % and Nova Scotia with an increase from 32.1% to 37.7%. New Brunswick remained fairly stable with a 1.8% increase. Cannabis use among adolescents was noticeably higher in Nova Scotia and considerably lower in Prince Edward Island.
- The reported use of LSD was greater in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick than in PEI, Newfoundland and Labrador.
- The reported use of Psilocybin or mescaline remained roughly 10%. However, the reported use of these drugs was lower in Prince Edward Island than in the other three provinces.
- Approximately 6.5% of adolescents in the Atlantic Provinces reported using inhalants.

**Table 3**  
**Proportions of Students Reporting Drug Use in the Atlantic Provinces**

Substance	NS	NB	NF	PEI
Alcohol	56.7	55.5	58.3	52.5
Tobacco	36.1	32.4	38.1	26.5
Cannabis	37.7	30.8	30.2	21.7
LSD	10.1	11.2	6.9	6.2
Stimulants, non-medical use	10.5	8.6	6.3	6.7
Stimulants, medical use	6.1	4.9	4.6	5.6
Psilocybin/Mescaline	10.7	9.3	12.2	6.7
Inhalants	7.0	5.9	7.2	6.7
Tranquilizers, non-medical use	5.9	3.9	3.7	3.4
Tranquilizers, medical use	5.7	5.3	4.6	3.9
Cocaine	4.7	4.2	3.5	2.8
Steroids	2.5	2.3	2.2	1.9
PCP	3.0	3.3	1.9	1.5
Heroin	2.8	1.8	2.0	2.0
Barbiturates, non-medical use	2.3	1.3	1.7	1.3
Barbiturates, medical use	1.4	1.0	1.6	1.0

- Non-prescribed stimulant use was greater in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick than in Prince Edward Island, whereas, prescribed stimulant use varied only slightly between the provinces.
- More Nova Scotia students reported using non-prescribed tranquilizers than students did in the other three provinces.
- The use of the remaining drugs was reported by less than 5% of adolescent students in grades 7, 9, 10 and 12.
- One concern is that in the past seven years, the proportion of students reporting cocaine use appears to have increased in Nova Scotia (from 2.5% in 1991 to 4.7% in 1998) and in New Brunswick (from 2.9% in 1992 to 4.1% in 1998).



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*"I think that when young people know that other people have the same problem as them or if they see what happened to other people from drugs and or alcohol, they might try to seek help."*

*Female, Grade 9, Age 14*

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## **Conclusions**

In the Atlantic region, an increase in the prevalence of hallucinogen use was noted from 1991 to 1996. In 1991-1992, about 17% of adolescent students in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick reported having used cannabis. Data from 1991 pertaining to Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island are not available. However, the proportions of students reporting cannabis use in 1996 and 1998 in the two island provinces are much higher than were found in 1991 in the two neighbouring Atlantic Provinces. Two provinces, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, experienced significant increases in the prevalence of cannabis use from 1996 to 1998.

Clearly in the Atlantic Provinces, large proportions of students smoke cigarettes or use hallucinogens and such use is much more common in 1998 than in 1991.

Finally, the overall situation in Prince Edward Island appears to be different than in the rest of the Atlantic Provinces. In particular, cigarette smoking and the use of hallucinogenic drugs are less common among adolescents in Prince Edward Island than in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The underlying causes of similarities and differences in the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use among adolescents in the four Atlantic Provinces are not known. However, this information may be useful as a baseline against which comparisons can be made after the implementation of drug prevention and education initiatives.

The 1998 survey revealed that a large proportion of our adolescents do not use drugs. However, a considerable proportion of our adolescents do use substances and are experiencing negative consequences from their use. Although some adolescents use drugs to the point of major life problems, the vast majority of adolescents using drugs are not in need of treatment. Our goal is to assist youth to navigate safely through their adolescence.

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*"I think they need to know that it's O.K. not to do it. Low self-confidence leads to a lot of drug and alcohol use. Growing up in a small community where there is not a lot to do, does not help either. I think there needs to be more support groups and hotlines that are confidential. They also need to be aware of what happens when drugs/alcohol are used."*

*Female, Grade 12, Age 18*

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## **Recommendations**

1. Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick should continue to enhance the level of inter-provincial co-operation in the field of addictions.
2. The standardized Student Drug Use Survey should be repeated periodically in the Atlantic Provinces.
3. Clear outcomes and measures should be developed as an essential first step to the evaluation of initiatives addressing alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, as well as problem gambling among adolescents.