

Alcohol and Drugs

Portrait of the Situation in 2002 and Main Comparisons with 2000

Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students

Since 1998, the Québec Ministry of Health has mandated the *Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ)* (Québec Institute of Statistics) to conduct ongoing surveys on smoking among youth. Two other areas of interest related to dependence have been integrated into the surveys – alcohol consumption and drug use, and gambling. As occurs with most large-scale surveys of this type, data is being collected in schools.

The third edition of the *Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students* took place in 2002, the previous ones in 1998 and 2000. The main goal of this biennial survey is to profile and monitor trends in the smoking habits of young people in Québec.

The survey not only indicates the prevalence and frequency of tobacco use, but also covers additional topics such as sociodemographic factors associated with smoking, access to cigarettes, exposure to environmental (second-hand) tobacco smoke (ETS), attitudes towards smoking and cessation activities.

Since the 2000 edition, the *Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students* has included two other sections on risk behaviours in youth – alcohol consumption and drug use, and gambling. The results confirm the importance of continually monitoring teenagers on their drinking and drug habits. They also confirm that expanding the section on gambling can help gain a better understanding of this emerging risk behaviour. The 3rd edition of the survey therefore presents analyses comparing alcohol consumption and drug use with that observed in the two previous editions of the survey, and a detailed cross-sectional portrait of gambling in 2002.

The 2002 results presented in this bulletin only cover the alcohol and drug section of the survey. They are based on data collected in the autumn of 2002 from approximately 4,800 students in Secondary 1 to 5 in 150 high schools across Québec.

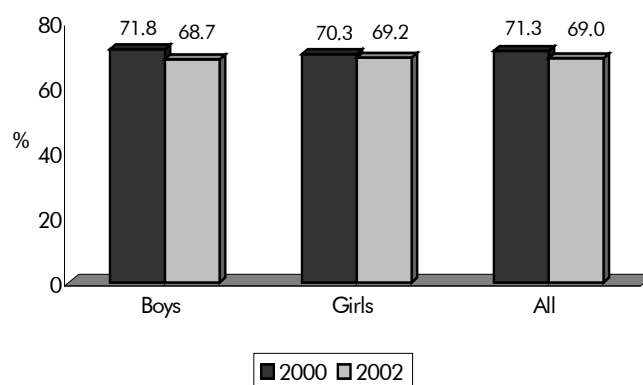
Partial results of the smoking and gambling sections are presented in two other bulletins. A report containing the complete results of the three sections will be published in the autumn of 2003.

Alcohol

Drinking : A Widespread Teenage Behaviour

In the autumn of 2002, 69% of Québec high school students reported having consumed alcohol at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. There was no significant¹ difference observed between this proportion and that observed in 2000 (Figure 1). This prevalence remained stable in both boys and girls, and similar to 2000, was evenly distributed in both groups.

Figure 1: Trends in Alcohol Consumption
by Sex, 2000-2002



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students, 2002*.

Boys Drink More Often than Girls

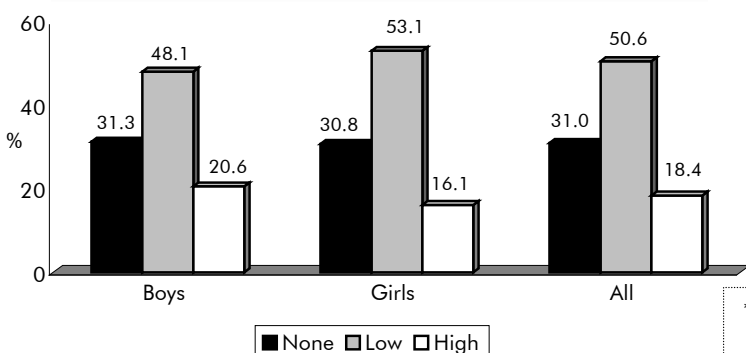
Boys showed a significant difference from girls in terms of the frequency of alcohol consumption (see box on next page for definitions of frequency categories for alcohol and drugs). In 2002, 21% of boys reported a high frequency of consumption of alcohol, compared to 16% of girls (Figure 2).

1. In this document the percentages are based on values that have been weighted and adjusted according to the sample design. The statistical tests have a confidence interval of 95%. Statistical differences are considered significant at the threshold of $p < 0.05$.

In contrast to boys, girls in 2002 tended to consume alcohol at a low frequency. This was also observed in 2000. In all, slightly more than half of students (51%) in 2002 reported consuming alcohol at a low frequency (Figure 2). More specifically, in the 12 months preceding the survey, 12% of students had consumed alcohol on an experimental basis, and 38% had consumed alcohol occasionally (data not shown). Of the students who reported consuming alcohol at a high frequency (18%), the vast majority were regular consumers (weekly), since daily consumption was practically non-existent (0.3%*; data not shown).

Indeed the proportion of abstainers significantly decreased between Secondary 1 (57%) and Secondary 5 (11%). This was mainly related to an increase in the proportion of students who consumed alcohol at a high frequency, which went from 5% in Secondary 1 to 36% in Secondary 5 (Figure 3). The proportion of students who consumed alcohol at a low frequency stabilized at around 55% from Secondary 2 onwards.

Figure 2: Frequency of Alcohol Consumption by Sex, 2002

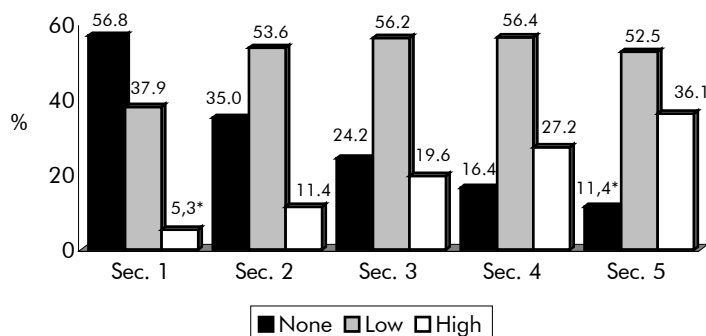


Source : Institut de la statistique du Québec, Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students, 2002.

As of Secondary 2, the Majority of Students Had Experimented with Alcohol

As shown in Figure 3, in general, the frequency of alcohol consumption varied significantly from one grade level to another.

Figure 3: Frequency of Alcohol Consumption by High School Grade Level, 2002



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students, 2002.

* An asterisk (*) beside an estimate indicates that its coefficient of variation is between 15% and 25%, and therefore should be interpreted with caution.

Drinking to a State of Drunkenness

The survey also examined the phenomenon of heavy drinking, meaning consuming enough alcohol to attain a state of drunkenness (for a more precise definition, see box below).

In 2002, approximately 44% of students reported at least one episode of heavy drinking in the 12 months preceding the survey, and 16% had done so at least five times during the same period.

Categorizing Alcohol Consumption and Drug Use

All the terms used to describe alcohol consumption or drug use in the survey are based on the same **reference period**, namely **the 12 months preceding the survey**. For each substance, **the overall prevalence of consumption/use refers to the proportion of students having consumed/used at least once during this 12-month period**.

Frequency of Consumption:

- **Abstainers (or non-consumers/users)** → did not consume/use
 - **Experimenters** → tried it only once
 - **Occasional** → consumed/used once a month or less
- } **Low frequency of consumption/use**
- **Regular** → consumed/used weekly
 - **Daily** → consumed/used every day
- } **High frequency of consumption/use**

Types of Alcohol Consumption:

- **Heavy Drinking** → consumed five standard drinks on a single occasion at least once
- **Repeatedly Heavy Drinking** → consumed five standard drinks on a single occasion at least five times

Among students who reported having drunk alcohol, 63% had drunk heavily at least once, and 23% had repeated this behaviour five times or more. These results were not significantly different from those obtained in 2000 (Figure 4).

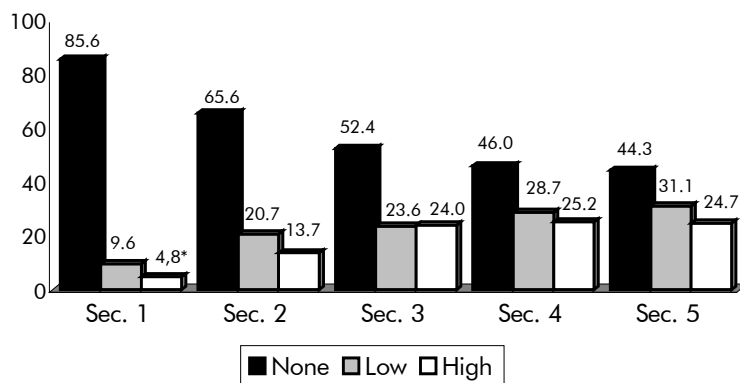
Figure 4: Trends in the Prevalence of Heavy Drinking and Repetitive Heavy Drinking, 2000-2002



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students, 2002.

In both 2000 and 2002, nearly 40% of high school students reported having used cannabis at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey (Table 1). In 2000, the proportion of boys having used cannabis was slightly higher than that of girls, but no discernible difference was observed in this regard in 2002.

Figure 5: Frequency of Cannabis Use by High School Grade Level, 2002



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students, 2002.

Drugs

Little Change from 2000 to 2002

The survey revealed virtually no change in the prevalence of drug use (all drugs combined) among Québec high school students between 2000 and 2002. Approximately 41% of students reported having used drugs at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. The two drugs used most by students continued to be cannabis and hallucinogens. Other types of drugs revealed only marginal prevalences of use (Table 1).

Table 1: Trends in Drug Use among High School Students, 2000-2002

	2000	2002
	%	
All drugs combined	42.9	41.2
Cannabis	40.6	39.1
Hallucinogens	15.6	12.5
Amphetamines	7.0	7.6
Cocaine	5.2	5.2
Solvents	2.9	2.2
Heroin	1.2	1.2
Other drugs	2.3	2.4

Already in Secondary 3, approximately 25% of Students Were Using Cannabis More than Once a Month

As expected, the proportion of high school students using cannabis increased with grade level. From Secondary 1 to 2, it climbed rapidly from 14% to 34%, finally attaining 56% in Secondary 5 (sum of high and low prevalences, Figure 5).

A closer look at the frequency of cannabis use in 2002 reveals that the proportion of low-frequency users increased from 10% to 25% between Secondary 1 and Secondary 3, stabilizing at approximately 30% in Secondary 4 and 5. The proportion of students reporting a high frequency of cannabis use increased from under 5% in Secondary 1 to 15% in Secondary 2, and then stabilized at 25% in the remaining three years of high school (Figure 5). Of note is that 4.4% of high school students (all grades combined) used cannabis daily. In Secondary 5, the proportion of students who used cannabis daily was approximately 7% (data not shown).

Slight Decrease in the Popularity of Hallucinogens Among Girls

The only significant reduction in overall prevalence observed between 2000 and 2002 was in the use of hallucinogens, going from 16% to 13% (Table 1). This was mainly related to a decrease in the proportion of girls using these substances, 15% in 2000 versus 11% in 2002. In boys, the prevalence remained stable, at approximately 15% (data not shown).

Similar to cannabis, the proportion of students using hallucinogens increased with grade level. In 2002, 3.6%* of students in Secondary 1 reported having used them. This proportion rose to just above 19% in Secondary 4 and 5 (data not shown).

Nearly 40% of Students Reported Having Consumed both Alcohol and Drugs

The majority of high school students had consumed both alcohol and drugs (all drugs combined), not necessarily simultaneously. The data show that 39% of students reported having consumed alcohol and having used drugs at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. Approximately 30% of students had only consumed alcohol. A very small proportion, 2.7%, had only used drugs. The proportion of complete abstainers (both alcohol and drugs) was approximately 28% (data not shown).

Conclusions

These results reveal that alcohol consumption and drug use, particularly cannabis, are rather widespread among Québec high school students. It seems clear that by Secondary 2 and Secondary 3, experimenting with alcohol and cannabis is already common practice among a rather large proportion of students. Although certain results reveal potentially problematic behaviours among a minority of students, the majority of high school students, 55% (data not shown), were either complete abstainers (alcohol and drugs) or consumed only alcohol at a low frequency. However, the situation of students in their last year of high school, Secondary 5, seems more worrisome. Indeed, how big is problematic consumption of alcohol and drugs in Québec high schools? The results obtained from the DEP-ADO screening tool, to be presented in the survey report in the autumn, will provide a more detailed portrait of the scale of this phenomenon.

Access to the Survey Findings

The ISQ encourages researchers and those working in the anti-smoking, drug addiction, and gambling fields to use the raw data of this survey. Researchers can access the data by contacting the *Centre d'accès aux données de recherche* of the ISQ (CADRISQ), with offices in Montréal and Québec City. Detailed data from the *Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students, 2002* will be available for the general public in the autumn of 2003. For further information on accessing the data, consult the ISQ's website at (www.stat.gouv.qc.ca).

Methodology in Brief

To ensure the validity of the comparisons, the methodology used in the survey has been the same from one edition to the next.

Target population: all students enrolled in high schools in Québec, public or private, francophone or anglophone, with the exception of schools not governed by the Ministry of Education, aboriginal schools, schools far from urban centres, and schools composed of at least 30% handicapped students. In all, the sample was therefore representative of more than 95% of students enrolled in high school in Québec.

Sample stratified by:

- Language of instruction
- Private or public system
- Region

Selection process:

- Random selection of schools (approximately 160)
- Random selection of classes (36 by grade level, 180 in all) in the schools previously selected at random – one class per school, sometimes two
- All students in the selected classes were asked to respond to a questionnaire (5,300 potential respondents).

Data collection instrument: Closed, anonymous, self-administered questionnaire given in the classroom under the supervision of an ISQ representative. The alcohol-drug section of the survey took questions from the DEP-ADO screening tool developed by RISQ (*Recherche et Intervention sur les Substances psychoactives – Québec*).

Data collection period: Early November to mid-December, every two years since 1998.

Combined response rate (classes and schools): 89.8 % (1998), 92.4 % (2000), 93.4 % (2002).

To learn more about the Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students

This bulletin, as well as highlights of the reports of the **Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students**, can be accessed on the ISQ's website at www.stat.gouv.qc.ca by clicking on "English," "Publications," "Studies and Analyses," section entitled "Health."

You can also telephone the Coordinator of the survey, Jacynthe Loiselle, at (514) 873-4749 or 1-800-463-4090 (toll-free if calling from outside the Montréal region).

Published by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec*.

Suggested reference: Perron, Bertrand, Loiselle, Jacynthe (2003). Portrait of the Situation in 2002 and Main Comparisons with 2000, *Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students, 2002* (Summary results), Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, June.

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