

Attention: News/Assignment/Health/Education Editors

Tobacco use is a strong indicator of other substance use and risky behaviour among 15–19 year olds, says new report by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse

OTTAWA, Dec. 06, 2006 – Young people who smoke cigarettes are much more likely than their non-smoking peers to drink and abuse alcohol, and to use cannabis and other illicit substances, says a new research report released today by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, Canada’s national addictions agency.

CCSA researchers analyzed data from the 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS)—the most comprehensive profile of alcohol and other drug use in Canada since 1994—to find out what tobacco use by 15–19 year olds could tell us about their use of alcohol, cannabis and other illicit drugs such as amphetamine and ecstasy. The data reveal that the association is very strong, although the research does not indicate whether tobacco is a “gateway drug”—that is, that it necessarily leads to other drug use. Here are some of the findings contained in the report, entitled *Risks Associated with Tobacco Use in Youth Aged 15–19*:

- 26.7% of 15–19 year olds reported that they smoked cigarettes at least occasionally in the year preceding the CAS.
- 97.7% of smoking youth also reported consuming alcohol in the past year, compared with 75.3% of non-smoking youth.
- 60% of smoking youth also met the criteria for hazardous drinking as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), compared with 23.7% of non-smoking youth.
- 91% of smoking youth reported using cannabis use in the past year, compared with 28.8% of non-smoking youth.
- 31% of smoking youth under 20 (including 15–19 year olds) reported using cocaine, heroin, amphetamine, ecstasy or hallucinogens in the past year, compared with 3.5% of non-smoking youth

“This research clearly shows that tobacco use among youth aged 15–19 is a powerful and effective marker of other substance use and a good indication that these youth are engaging in other risky behaviours, such as hazardous drinking,” said Rita Notarandrea, CCSA’s Deputy Chief Executive Office and Director of Research and Policy. “There is a strong message here for parents and educators to recognize the correlation between tobacco and other substance use, and to start a dialogue with young smokers about their use of alcohol and other drugs. This information should also help to inform prevention strategies being developed by all orders of government and organizations serving youth.”

Organizations such as the Canadian Council for Tobacco Control (CCTC) agree that this new data provides additional credence to the importance of preventing tobacco use among youth and adolescents.

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“The Canadian Council for Tobacco Control is committed to strong and effective tobacco control,” said CCTC Executive Director Robert Walsh. “This kind of research contributes by making the links between tobacco use among youth and additional risky behaviour such as illicit drug use or heavy drinking. By identifying and flagging these upstream indicators of future substance use, we hope to prevent tobacco use among youth, persuade current smokers to stop using tobacco products, encourage more effective prevention strategies, and ultimately decrease the harms and costs to the individual and to society.”

For additional information about youth-focused tobacco resources, please visit:

Canada:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/index_e.html (Go Smoke-Free, Health Canada)

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/youth-jeunes/index_e.html (Health Canada Youth Zone)

<http://www.cctc.ca/> (Canadian Council for Tobacco Control)

Provinces and Territories:

<http://www.talkingwithyourkids.ca/> (Council of the Federation)

About the *Canadian Addiction Survey*:

The Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS) was a collaborative initiative sponsored by Health Canada, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) and the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions (CECA)—which includes the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC), the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM), the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), the Prince Edward Island Provincial Health Authority, and the Kaiser Foundation—the Centre for Addictions Research of BC (CAR-BC), and the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia. Analysis presented in this and similar reports is intended to supplement the original CAS detailed report.

About CCSA: (www.ccsa.ca)

CCSA is Canada's national addictions agency and is supported by Health Canada through Canada's Drug Strategy. Established by an Act of Parliament in 1988, CCSA provides objective, evidence-based information and advice aimed at reducing the health, social and economic harm associated with substance abuse and addictions.

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