

# Newfoundland and Labrador Student Drug Use 2007

## HIGHLIGHTS REPORT



# NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR STUDENT DRUG USE SURVEY 2007

## SUMMARY REPORT

Investigators:

**Renee Ryan**

Addictions Consultant  
Department of Health and Community Services  
Main Floor, West Block  
Confederation Building  
St. John's, NL

**Christiane Poulin, MD, MSc, FRCPC**

Professor and  
Canada Research Chair in Population Health and Addictions  
Department of Community Health and Epidemiology  
Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

November 2007

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *2007 Newfoundland and Labrador Student Drug Use Survey* Working Group gratefully acknowledges the help of the school boards, principals and teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador. Most importantly, we thank the students who played a major role in ensuring the success of this project.

The *2007 Newfoundland and Labrador Student Drug Use Survey* involved collaboration among the Department of Health and Community Services, the Department of Education and Dalhousie University.

The *Student Drug Use Survey in the Atlantic Provinces* was standardized in 1994 under the leadership of Dr. Christiane Poulin, and previous surveys were carried out in 1996, 1998 and 2002/2003.

Dr. Poulin is the author of *2007 Student Drug Use Survey in the Atlantic Provinces: Technical Report*. Dr. Poulin's document provided the data for this summary report.

The *2007 Newfoundland and Labrador Student Drug Use Survey* was coordinated by the following team:

- Renee Ryan (Chair), Department of Health and Community Services
- Bill Dwyer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Kevin Foley, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
- Steve Knight, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
- Carol Ann MacDonald, Department of Health and Community Services

- Bernie Squires, Department of Health and Community Services
- Kerry Pope, Department of Education
- Dave Martin, Department of Education
- Kim Baldwin, Eastern Health

Additional thanks for providing support with the administration of the survey and summary report preparation are extended to:

- Barbara Jackman, Department of Health and Community Services
- Bernadine Power, Department of Health and Community Services
- Vicki LeDrew, Department of Health and Community Services
- Jackie Vickers, Department of Health and Community Services
- Mark Fudge, Eastern Health

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2007 Student Drug Use Survey in Newfoundland and Labrador asked junior and senior high school students (Grades 7, 9 and Levels I and III) about their experiences with substance use, gambling and associated risk behaviours. The 2007 survey also asked students questions about their mental health and help-seeking behaviours.

This was the fourth Student Drug Use Survey administered in Newfoundland and Labrador schools. The results of the 2007 survey, along with the previous three surveys (1996, 1998, 2003), will be used to determine prevalence and trends in student drug use. The results from this survey will further inform youth focussed prevention and intervention initiatives.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The fourth survey uses a sample of randomly selected classes within randomly selected schools in the province. This report is based on the responses of 3848 students in the randomly selected classes.

Participation was anonymous and confidential. The survey was administered in Newfoundland and Labrador in the spring of 2007. The survey requested information from students in the public school system in grades 7 and 9 (junior high) and Levels I and III (senior high).

The questionnaire comprised almost 100 items and one open-ended question. Information was requested on demographics, substance use, risk behaviours and problems, help seeking, gambling, school drug education and rules, as well as mental health.

## FINDINGS

- In 2007, 41.4% of students reported they had not used alcohol, cigarettes or any other drugs in the twelve months prior to the survey. This is an increase in youth who abstain as compared to 2003 (36%), 1998 (35%) and 1996 (36%).
- Alcohol, cannabis and tobacco remain the three most commonly used substances by Newfoundland and Labrador students.
- In 2007, 52% of students reported using alcohol; 29.5% of students reported using cannabis; and 16.9% of students reported using tobacco at least once in the course of the year.
- The prevalence of student alcohol use in the past year has decreased from 58% in 2003 to 52% in 2007.
- The prevalence of student cannabis use in the past year has decreased from 35% in 2003 to 29.5% in 2007, reversing an upward trend, reported in previous surveys.
- Tobacco use shows the biggest decrease in past year use from 27.3% in 2003 to 16.9% in 2007.
- The prevalence of cocaine use was 5.3% in 2007 compared with 3.7% in 2003. While this was not a significant increase, there appears to be a slow upward trend in cocaine use starting in 1996 when 3% of students reported cocaine use.
- The biggest increase is seen in the prevalence of Ecstasy. The number of students who reported past year use of Ecstasy increased from 2% in 2003 up to 7.2% in 2007.
- 5.1% of students used methylphenidate (Ritalin) without a prescription at least once in the 12 months before the survey.

- 
- The remaining substances were used by a smaller percentage of students.
  - The 2007 survey introduced the Atlantic Alcohol- and Drug-Risk Continua. Among students in grades 9 and higher, 20% had three or more alcohol problem indicators and 11% had three or more drug problem indicators. These groups are considered to be using substances in a high-risk manner.

### ***Alcohol***

- Slightly more than half (52%) of students reported alcohol use at least once during the course of the 12 months before the survey. This represents a slight decrease from the previous three surveys (58% in 2003 and 1998, and 55% in 1996).
- 27.7% of adolescent students reported they had consumed alcohol to the point of drunkenness on at least one occasion in the 30 days prior to the survey.
- Social sources were key to providing access to alcohol for students. Less than 7% of students purchased alcohol themselves; 26.9% obtained it at home with or without parental permission.

### ***Cannabis***

- Cannabis remains the second most popular drug used by Newfoundland and Labrador students.
- In 2007, 29.5% of students reported that they had used cannabis at least once in the 12 months before the survey, compared to 35% in 2003.
- The average age at first use of cannabis was 13.5 years.

### ***Tobacco***

- Tobacco remains the third most commonly used substance among students in this province.
- Tobacco use again showed the greatest marked decrease among Newfoundland and Labrador students. 16.9% reported smoking in the 12 months before the survey, down from 38.1% in 1998, and 27.3% in 2003.

### ***Other drug use: Ecstasy, Cocaine and Methamphetamine***

- In 2007, 7.2% of Newfoundland and Labrador students reported use of Ecstasy on at least one occasion in the 12 months before the survey. This represents an increase of 5.2 percentage points from 2003 when Ecstasy was first included in the survey.
- The prevalence of cocaine use was 5.3% in 2007 compared with 3.7% in 2003. There appears to be an upward trend starting in 1996 when 3% of students reported cocaine use.
- 2.4% of students reported methamphetamine use at least once in the 12 months before the survey.

### ***Alcohol & Drug Related Problems***

- The highest rated problems associated with drinking by Newfoundland and Labrador students included injuring oneself (10.4%), damaging things (9.0%), and tensions with family or friends (8.4%).
- Drug-related problems include tensions with family or friends (6.3%), spending on drugs prevented buying other things (5.4%), and drug use affecting school work and exams (4.5%).

---

### ***Risk Behaviours***

- Among licensed drivers in grades 10 and 12, 16.3% of students reported having driven a vehicle within an hour of drinking *alcohol*.
- Among licensed drivers in grades 10 and 12, 29.5% of students reported having driven a vehicle within an hour of using *cannabis*.
- In 2007, 16.9% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador were passengers in a vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking *alcohol*. 22.2% of students reported having been a passenger with a driver who had been using *cannabis*.
- Of students who had sex during the year, 35.3% reported that on at least one occasion during the year, they had had unplanned sex after using alcohol or other drugs.
- Students in grade 12 were more likely than younger students to have had unplanned sex after using alcohol or other drugs.

### ***Gambling***

- 61.6% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador participated in at least one gambling activity. This represents a decrease from 65% in 2003 and 74% in 1998.
- 3.6% of students in this province met the definition of *at-risk* gambling whereas 1.7% met *problem* gambling criteria.

### ***Mental Health***

- 19.8% of Newfoundland and Labrador students scored as having *somewhat elevated* depressive symptoms on a screening tool, and 4.5% scored as

having *very elevated* depressive symptoms.

- In 2007, 4.3% of students scored positive on a screening tool for Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder.
- 15.6% of Newfoundland and Labrador students reported they needed help for depressive symptoms. 4.0% reported they actually received help for these symptoms.

### **CONCLUSION**

While more than 40% of students in Grades 7 and 9 and Levels I and III in this province choose to remain substance free, the majority have some involvement with substance use. A particular concern is the risk-taking behaviors resulting from impaired decision making due to the use of substances. Risk behaviors include driving while under the influence of alcohol or cannabis, being a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who is under the influence, or engaging in unplanned sexual activity.

Students acknowledge substance use impacts on various life areas including education, personal /family relationships, and financial status. Those who recognize that they need help with their substance use and/or mental health symptoms often do not seek the help they need.

Interventions directed to youth can have a positive effect on substance use decision-making. Tobacco has shown a steady decline since the first survey in 1996. The survey results would suggest current substance use prevention interventions are having a positive impact and additional prevention initiatives would be worthwhile.

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 2007 Student Drug Use Survey in Newfoundland and Labrador asked junior and senior high school students (grades 7, 9, and Levels I and III) about their experiences with substance use, gambling and associated risk behaviors. The 2007 survey also asked students questions about their mental health and help-seeking behaviors.

This was the fourth Student Drug Use Survey administered in Newfoundland and Labrador schools. Due to sample size issues, the 2003 survey represented the island portion of the province only.

The results of the 2007 survey along with the previous three surveys (1996, 1998, and 2003) will be used to determine prevalence and trends in student drug use. The results from this survey will further inform youth focused prevention and intervention initiatives.

The questionnaire comprised almost 100 items and one open-ended question. Information was requested on demographics, substance use, risk behaviors and problems, help seeking, gambling, school drug education and rules, as well as mental health.

---

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

This fourth survey uses a sample of randomly-selected classes within randomly-selected schools in the province. The present report is based on the responses of 3848 students, representing an 82% response rate based on the number of students enrolled in the selected classes.

Participation was anonymous and confidential. The survey was administered in Newfoundland and Labrador in the spring of 2007. The survey requested information from students in the public school system in grades 7 and 9 (junior high) and Levels I and III (senior high).

---

## FINDINGS IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

- In 2007, 41.4% of students reported they had not used alcohol, cigarettes or any other drugs in the twelve months prior to the survey. This is an increase in youth who abstain as compared to 36% in 2003, 35% in 1998, and 36% in 1996.
- Alcohol, cannabis and tobacco remain the three most commonly used substances by Newfoundland and Labrador students.
- More than half (52%) of students reported using alcohol; 29.5% of students reported using cannabis; and 16.9% of students reported using tobacco at least once in the twelve months before the survey.
- In 2007, 7.2% of students used Ecstasy on at least one occasion in the 12 months before the survey.
- Cocaine or crack use was reported by 5.3% of students on at least one occasion in the 12 months before the survey.
- In 2007, 5.1% of students used methylphenidate (Ritalin) without a prescription at least once in the 12 months before the survey.

Table 1

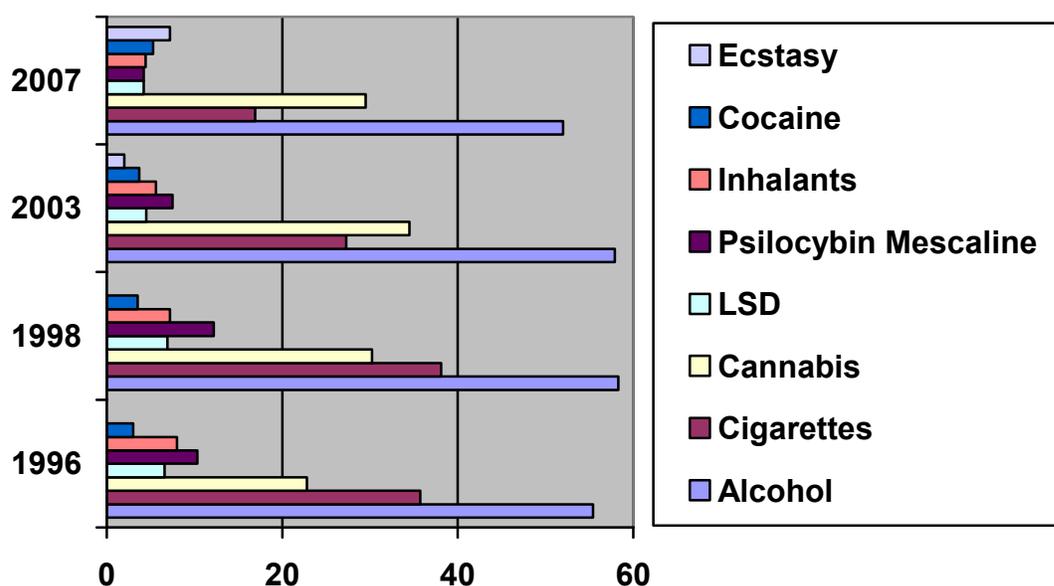
Any substance use in the year before the survey among Newfoundland and Labrador students in grades, 7, 9 and Levels I & III, as percentages, 2007

<b>Any use of...</b>	<b>%</b>
Alcohol	52.0
Cannabis	29.5
Cigarettes	16.9
Ecstasy	7.2
Cocaine	5.3
Methylphenidate non-med	5.1
Inhalants	4.4
Psilocybin or Mescaline	4.2
LSD	4.2
Amphetamine non-med	3.2
Tranquilizers non-med	3.0
Methamphetamine	2.4
Steroids	1.5

## TRENDS FROM 1996, 1998, 2003 & 2007

- The survey shows an increase of 5 percentage points, from 36% in 2003 to 41% in 2007, in the number of students who reported having abstained from all substance use.
- Alcohol, cannabis and cigarettes continue to be the substances most commonly used by students in Newfoundland and Labrador, and throughout Atlantic Canada.
- In Newfoundland and Labrador, the prevalence of student alcohol use has decreased from about 58% in 2003 to 52% in 2007.
- Fewer students smoked cigarettes in 2007 than any other survey year. 16.9% of students reported smoking in the course of the year, as compared to 27.3% in 2003, 38.1% in 1998 and 35.7% in 1996.
- The prevalence of past year cannabis use showed a decrease of 5 percentage points, from 35% in 2003 to 29.5% in 2007. This represents a reverse of the upward trend reported in previous surveys.
- The prevalence of cocaine use was 5.3% in 2007 compared with 3.7% in 2003. While this was not a significant increase, there appears to be a slow upward trend in cocaine use starting from 1996 when 3% of students reported cocaine use.
- The biggest increase is noted in the use of Ecstasy. Results indicate an increased prevalence from 2% in 2002 up to 7.2% in 2007.
- The use of Psilocybin/mescaline, LSD, and inhalants decreased overall from 2003 to 2007.

**Figure 1: Any substance use 1996-2007, in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students**



---

## ALCOHOL

- In 2007, 30% of students surveyed reported they had never consumed alcohol.
- More than half (52%) of students reported they had used alcohol at least once in the twelve months before the survey, compared to 58% in 2003.
- The average age of first alcohol consumption was 12.9 years.
- Prevalence of alcohol use dramatically increased from 11% in Grade 7 to 50.8% in Grade 9.
- In 2007, 31.1% of students consumed alcohol more than once per month, compared to 37% in 2003.
- Consuming five or more drinks at one sitting was reported by 29.7% of students in the prior 30 days before the survey.
- About 27.7% of students reported they had been drunk at least once in the month before the survey.
- Patterns of alcohol use were similar between males and females.
- Social sources were key to providing access to alcohol for students. Less than 7% of students purchased alcohol themselves while 26.6% obtained it at home, with or without parental permission.

Figure 2: Any alcohol use in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007

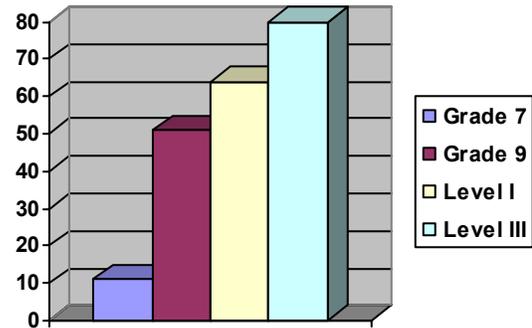
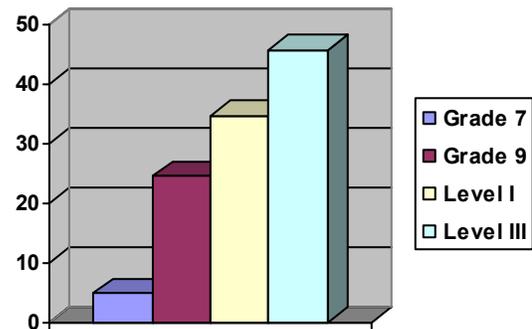


Figure 3: Drunkenness in the month before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007



*“Yes, when it said how often do you drink I said just a sip because usually [sic] on Christmas, or New Years I’ll ask my mom or dad for a sip of beer.”*  
-male, grade 7

*“Yes, I do not use alcohol anymore, I have gave [sic] it up in the last few months. I do not use any sort of drug.”*  
-male, grade 9

*“No one where I live does any drug (weed, beer) on school nites (sic). It’s like an unwritten rule. When it do be used we do a lot at one time, but may not touch it again for like weeks/months.”*

---

## CANNABIS

- Cannabis remains the second most popular drug used by Newfoundland and Labrador students.
- The average age of first cannabis use is 13.5 years.
- About one third (29.5%) of junior and senior high school students reported having used cannabis at least once during the course of the year as compared with 35% in 2003. This represents a decrease of 5 percentage points and reverses an upward trend reported in previous student drug use surveys.
- In the month before the survey, 12.2% of students reported using cannabis at least once, while 4.6% reported daily use.
- The prevalence of cannabis use increased with grade level. The largest prevalence increase is seen between grade 7 (3.8%) and grade 9 (28.9%).
- Cannabis use was equally common among male and female students. Male students (6.6%) were more likely than female students (2.4%) to have reported daily use.

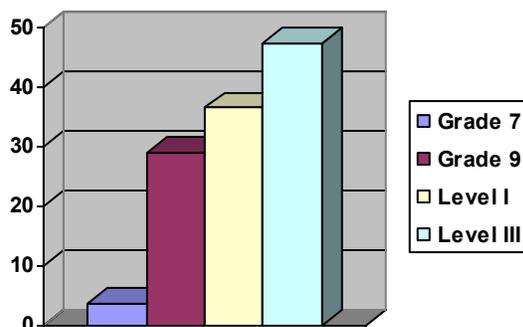
*“Not every teen is an angsty [sic] pot-smoking head case. I like life.”  
- female, grade 10*

*“I have a friend who uses cannabis on a daily basis and I can’t seem to find anyway to help him. I feel lost because there is nothing I can do to help.”  
- male, grade 9*

*“I only tried drugs. I don’t use them anymore because of a favour to a good friend. (...) I’d rather have a good friend than a gram of weed.”  
- female, grade 9*

*“Drugs like weed aren’t that bad. Alcohol is much worse. Marijuana should be legal.”  
- female, grade 12*

**Figure 4: Any cannabis use in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007**



---

## TOBACCO

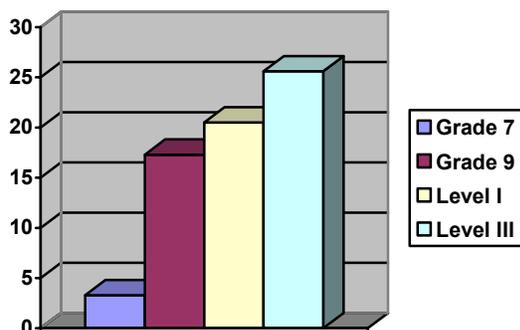
- The average age for first smoking a whole cigarette was 12.6 years.
- In 2007, 16.9% of students reported cigarette smoking at least once during the course of the year compared to 27.3% in 2003.
- In 2007, 13.3% of students reported having smoked ten or less cigarettes per day in the course of the year, while 3.6% of students smoked more than 10 cigarettes per day in the course of the year.
- As the legal age to purchase cigarettes is 19 years in all four Atlantic Provinces, 5.5% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador used fake identification or lied about their age to obtain cigarettes.
- Of the 16.9% of students who reported having smoked cigarettes during the past year, 64% indicated an attempt to quit in the previous six months. This represents a 7% increase from 2003 in attempts at smoking cessation.
- Male and female students were equally likely to have smoked cigarettes in the 12 months before the survey.

*“I did do most of the following, especially [sic] smoking but I quit within the last year.”  
-female, grade 10*

*“I smoked. I quit about 6 months ago (ciggarettes [sic], and pot).”  
-female, grade 12*

*“I smoke about 2 or 3 cigarettes a day, I’m going to try weed. I often feel mad and depressed because of “friends”, family problems and boy problems!”  
-female, grade 7*

**Figure 5: Any cigarette smoking in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007**



---

## OTHER DRUG USE

### Ecstasy

- Ecstasy is a synthetic psychoactive drug with both stimulant and hallucinogenic properties.
- In 2007, 7.2% of Newfoundland and Labrador students reported using Ecstasy in the past year, up from the 2% observed in 2003.
- Males and females were equally likely to have used Ecstasy.

### Cocaine

- In 2007, 5.3% of students reported cocaine use at least once in the 12 months before the survey.
- The prevalence of cocaine use was 5.3% in 2007 compared with 3.7% in 2003. While this was not a significant increase, there appears to be a slow upward trend in cocaine use starting in 1996 when 3% of students reported cocaine use.
- There were no significant differences in the use of cocaine between male and female students.

### LSD

- In 2007, 4.2% of Newfoundland and Labrador students reported using LSD at least once in the course of the year.
- There were no major differences between males and females in their reported use.

*“I don’t really like admitting I am addicted to a lot of drugs and alcohol but I am and I won’t do anything to help people. Sometimes people say I need it but I refuss [sic] to go.”  
-male, grade 9*

*“Life is not what its made out to be. As the famous Maroon 5 song goes “It’s not always rainbows and butterflies.” But I’m content with my life. If it wasn’t for the drugs, I don’t know how I would manage. Some things are just better left alone. We all have our faults and problems and we all deal with them in our own special way.”  
-female, grade 10*

*“I do not use drugs or alcohol I think people who do really need to step back look at their life and realize what a complete waste of time those things really are.”  
-male, grade 7*

### Psilocybin & Mescaline

- Psilocybin and mescaline are hallucinogenic drugs. Psilocybin comes from certain mushrooms and mescaline comes from the peyote cactus.
- In 2007, 4.2% of students reported using these drugs at least once in the course of the year compared to 8% of students in 2003.

---

### **Amphetamines & Methylphenidate (Ritalin)**

- In 2007, 3.2% of students used amphetamines without a prescription at least once in the course of the year.
- 5.1% of students used methylphenidate (Ritalin) without a prescription at least once in the twelve months before the survey, compared to 6% in 2003.
- Males and females were equally likely to have used these substances without a prescription.

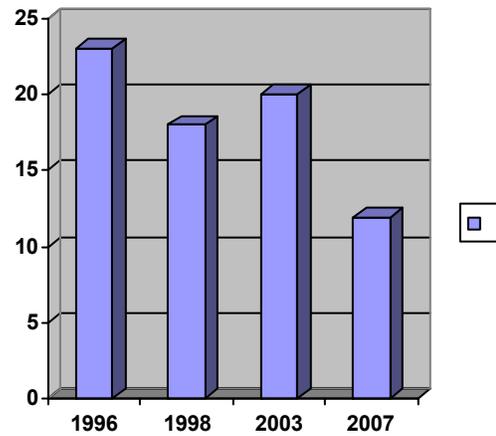
### **Other Substances**

- In 2007, 2.4% of students reported using Methamphetamine (crystal meth or speed) on at least one occasion in the previous twelve months before the survey.
- In 2007, 1.5% of students reported use of non-medical steroids at least once in the course of the year. Males were more likely than females to report this use.
- A new item asking about the non-medical use of opiate drugs was found to be not valid and is therefore not included in the present Highlights Report.

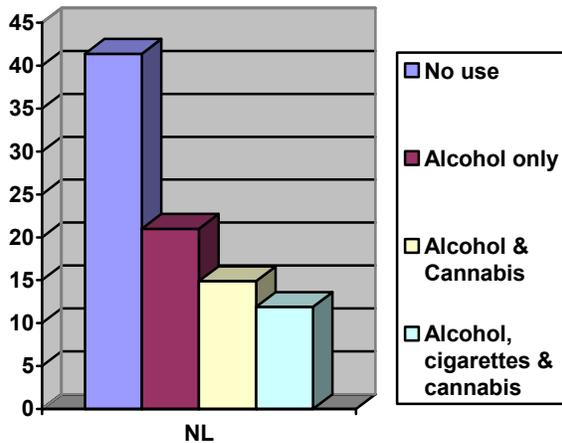
## MULTIPLE SUBSTANCE USE

- In 2007, the three most common patterns of substance use among junior and senior high students were alcohol only (21%), alcohol and cannabis (14.9%) and alcohol, cigarettes and cannabis (11.8%).
- The vast majority of students who used an illicit substance also used cannabis.
- Since 1996, there has been a downward trend in the numbers of students who use more than one drug. The exception was in 2003 where there was a slight increase.

**Figure 7: Numbers of students using alcohol, tobacco and cannabis, in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 1996-2007**



**Figure 6: Pattern of substance use in NL, in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007**



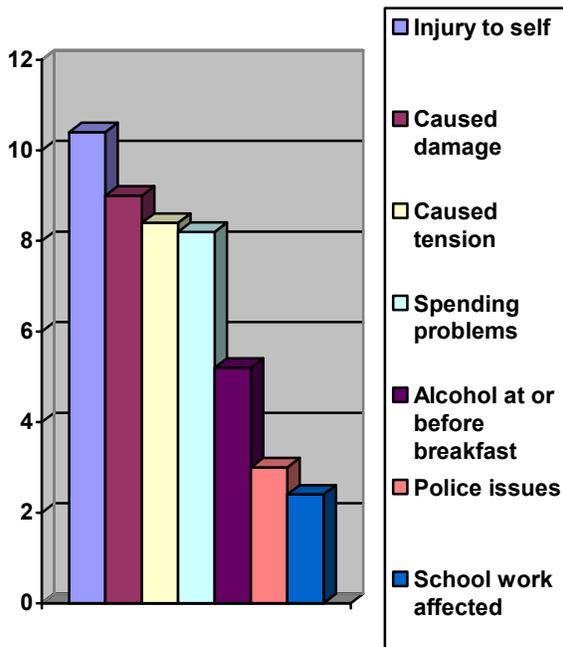
## ALCOHOL-RELATED PROBLEMS & RISKS

- The highest-rated problems associated with drinking by Newfoundland and Labrador students included injuring oneself (10.4%), damaging things (9.0%), and tensions with family or friends (8.4%).
- Male and female students were both likely to report alcohol-related problems or risks.
- Alcohol-related problems or risks were more common among grade 9, and Level I and III students.

*“As for drugs and alcohol, I only use them socially on weekends, never on weekdays because I pride myself on my work ethic and high marks. I am an honours student. I only smoke when drinking.”*  
*-male, grade 10*

*“If I had a lot of money all the time, I would be an alcoholic – cocaine addict because I love both. But I don’t want to be at the same time, because it would hurt those who love me.”*  
*-female, grade 10*

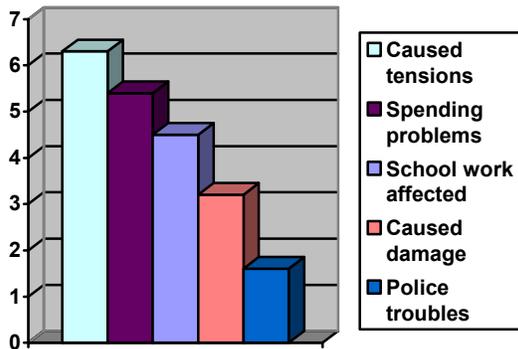
**Figure 8: Alcohol related problems or risks in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007**



## DRUG RELATED PROBLEMS

- The three most common drug-related problems were drug use causing increased tensions with family or friends (6.3%), spending on drugs prevented buying other things (5.4%), and school work or exams affected by drug use (4.5%).
- Both males and females were equally likely to have reported these drug-related problems or risks.
- As with alcohol use, the prevalence of drug-related consequences is higher with increasing grade level.

Figure 9: Drug related problems or risks in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007



*“I use marijuana on a regular basis (more than once a day) and feel it does not interfere with my schooling at all. I have used consistently for three years and have received honours every year. Only negative is throat/lung problem and short-term memory loss. In my opinion, marijuana is no more dangerous than alcohol and should be legal. I plan on continuing my cannabis use throughout university \*Legalize\*”  
-male, grade 12*

*“I use drugs and alcohol but in a mature fashion. Drugs do not effect (sic) the things you do unless you let them.”  
-female, grade 12*

*“I’m comfortable being lonely [sic] and sad. I’ve grown used to the dark life I live. The drugs I take provid [sic] friends in my mind that keep me company. I’m quite content with my crack rock and cannabis.”  
-male, grade 9*

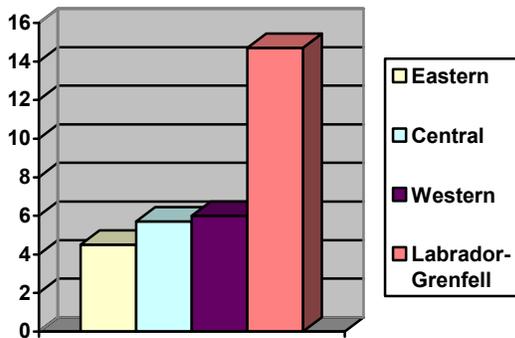
---

## DRIVING, DRINKING & CANNABIS USE

### *Alcohol*

- In 2007, 16.3% of students with a driver's license drove a motor vehicle within one hour of drinking *alcohol*. In 2003, 18% of students reported having done this.
- In 2007, 5.9 % of all students in Grade 7, 9, 10 and 12 reported driving within one hour of drinking alcohol. Males were slightly more likely than females to do so. The biggest difference was observed in Labrador-Grenfell Region, where 14.7% of students in these grades reported driving within one hour of drinking alcohol.

**Figure 10: Drove within one hour of drinking alcohol, by health region, as percentages of all students, Grades 7, 9, 10 and 12, 2007**



- In 2007, 16.9% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador reported having been passengers in a motor vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol.

### *Cannabis*

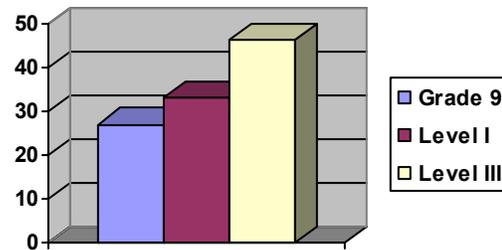
- 29.5% of students with a driver's license reported driving a motor vehicle within an hour of using *cannabis* on at least one occasion in the course of the year, up from 20% in 2003. About 6.1% of students in grades 7, 9 and Levels I and III reported that on at least one occasion in the year they had driven a vehicle after having used cannabis.
- In 2007, 22.2% of students reported that on at least one occasion in the year, they had been a passenger in a vehicle driven by a person who had used *cannabis*. Males and females were equally likely to do so. Students in Level III (43%) and Level I (25%) were more likely than those in grade 9 (17.3%) or grade 7 (3.2%) to do so.

---

## ALCOHOL, DRUGS & SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

- Students in grade 9, Level I, and Level III responded, where comfortable, to questions on sexual behavior.
- In 2007, 21.2% of students in grade 9, 35.1% in Level I, and 56.1% in Level III reported to have engaged in sexual intercourse at least once in the course of the year.
- Males and females were equally likely to have engaged in sexual intercourse.
- Sexual intercourse was more common among senior than junior high school students.
- Of the students who had sexual intercourse, 35.3% reported having had unplanned sexual intercourse under the influence of a substance on at least one occasion in the course of the year. 46.3% of level III students reported having done so compared to 27.1% of students in grade 9.
- Of those who had sexual intercourse, 61.2% of students reported to have used a condom at the time of their last sexual intercourse. This rate is unchanged from the 2003 survey.
- In 2007, the rate of reported condom use at the time of their last sexual intercourse was lower among females (54.8%) than males (68.5%). This pattern is consistent with the 2003 report.

**Figure 11: Rate of unplanned sexual activity after using alcohol or drugs, by school grade, as percentages of all students, 2007**



---

## **SCHOOL DRUG EDUCATION & RULES**

- In 2007, 66.1% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador reported they had received at least one class covering topics of decision-making, peer pressure, assertiveness or refusal skills related to substance use.
- In 2007, 81% of students reported that their school had a rule against smoking on school property. More females than males were aware of this rule.
- 90.7% of students in Level III knew of this rule compared to 68.6% of students in grade 7.

*“Our schools need more classes about teenage problems and problems we face like drug use and alcohol use. Teachers need to develop [sic] classes to deal and face these problems. We spend 6 hours a day here, we should be doing this.”*

*-female, grade 10*

*“People still smoke on school property.”*

*-male, grade 10*

*“Good luck! More class discussion needs to be done on these topics. It’s lacking in schools. Thanks.”*

*-female, grade 12*

*“I think that there should be more classes talking about drugs, and sex-aid [sic] class should be offered in high school.”*

*-female, grade 10*

## ATLANTIC ALCOHOL & DRUG - RISK CONTINUA

The Atlantic Alcohol Risk Continuum (AARC) and the Atlantic Drug Risk Continuum (ADRC) are population health tools that were developed to monitor the overall level of risk associated with substance use in the general adolescent population.

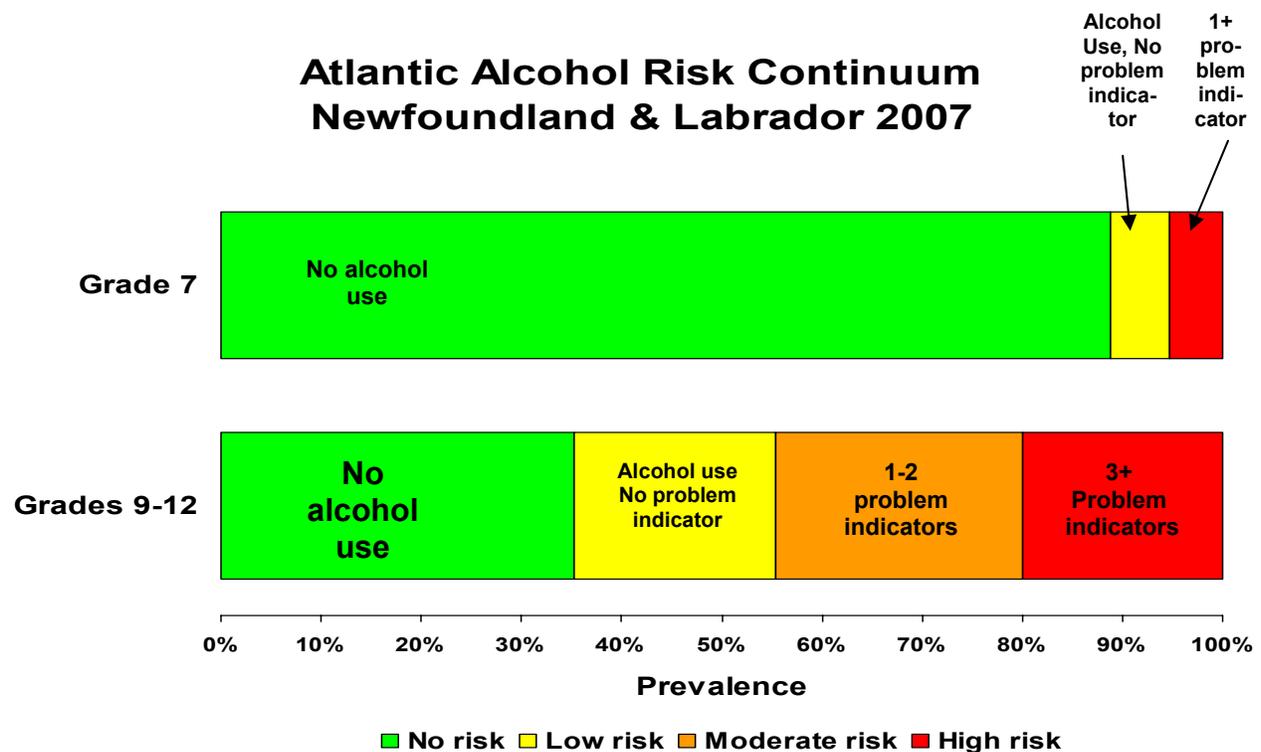
The Risk Continua categorize this population into four mutually exclusive groups of alcohol- or drug-related risk comprising “No”, “Low”, “Moderate” and “High” risk. The AARC and ADRC take into account a number of problem indicators related to alcohol use, drug use, and

unplanned sexual intercourse after alcohol or drug use.

### *Atlantic Alcohol Risk Continuum*

In 2007, 5% of Newfoundland and Labrador students in grade 7 and 20% of students in grades 9, 10 and 12 were on the high end of the Atlantic Alcohol Risk Continuum.

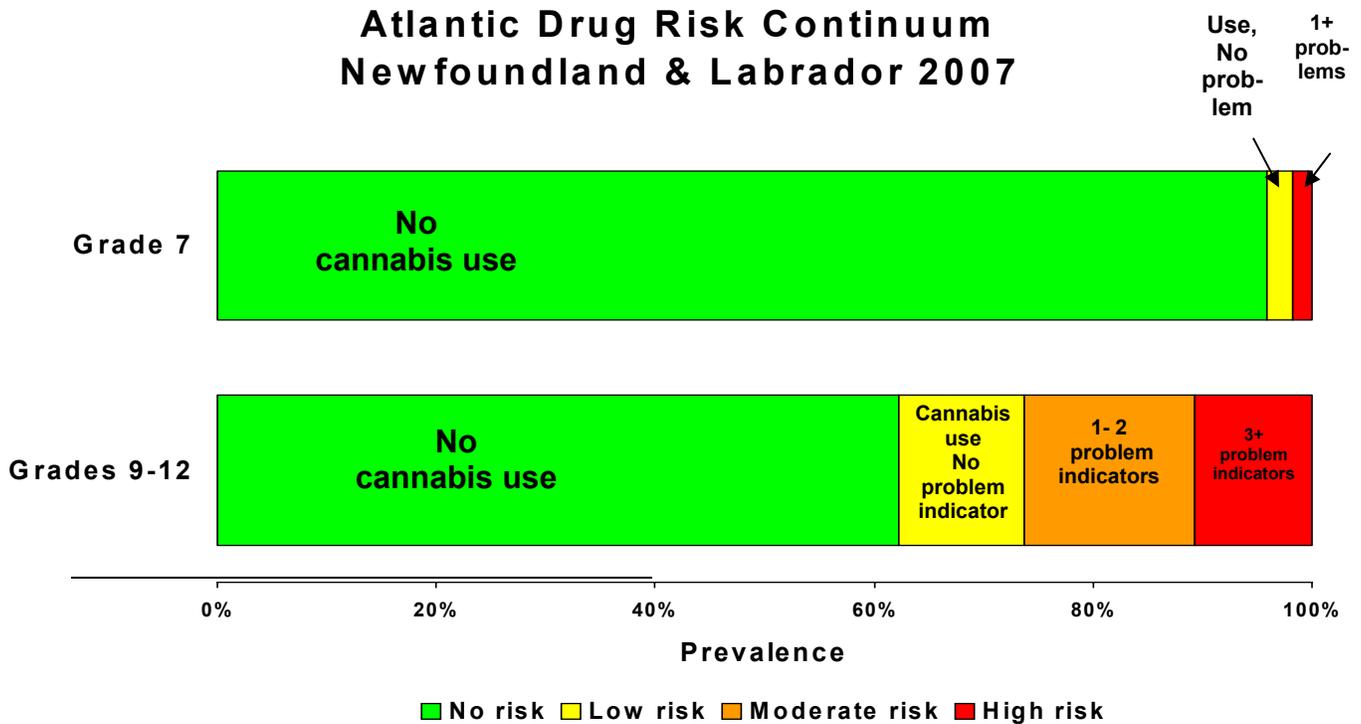
Students in grades 9, 10 and 12 who indicated they had consumed five or more drinks at a sitting on at least one occasion in the month before the survey were more likely than their counterparts who had not engaged in this pattern of drinking to fall on the high end of the Continuum.



**Atlantic Drug Risk Continuum**

- In 2007, 2% of Newfoundland and Labrador students in grade 7 and 11% of students in grades 9, 10 and 12 were on the High end of the Atlantic Drug Risk Continuum.

- Students in grades 9, 10 and 12 who indicated they had used cannabis daily in the month before the survey were more likely than their counterparts who had not engaged in this frequency of cannabis use, to fall on the high end of the Continuum.

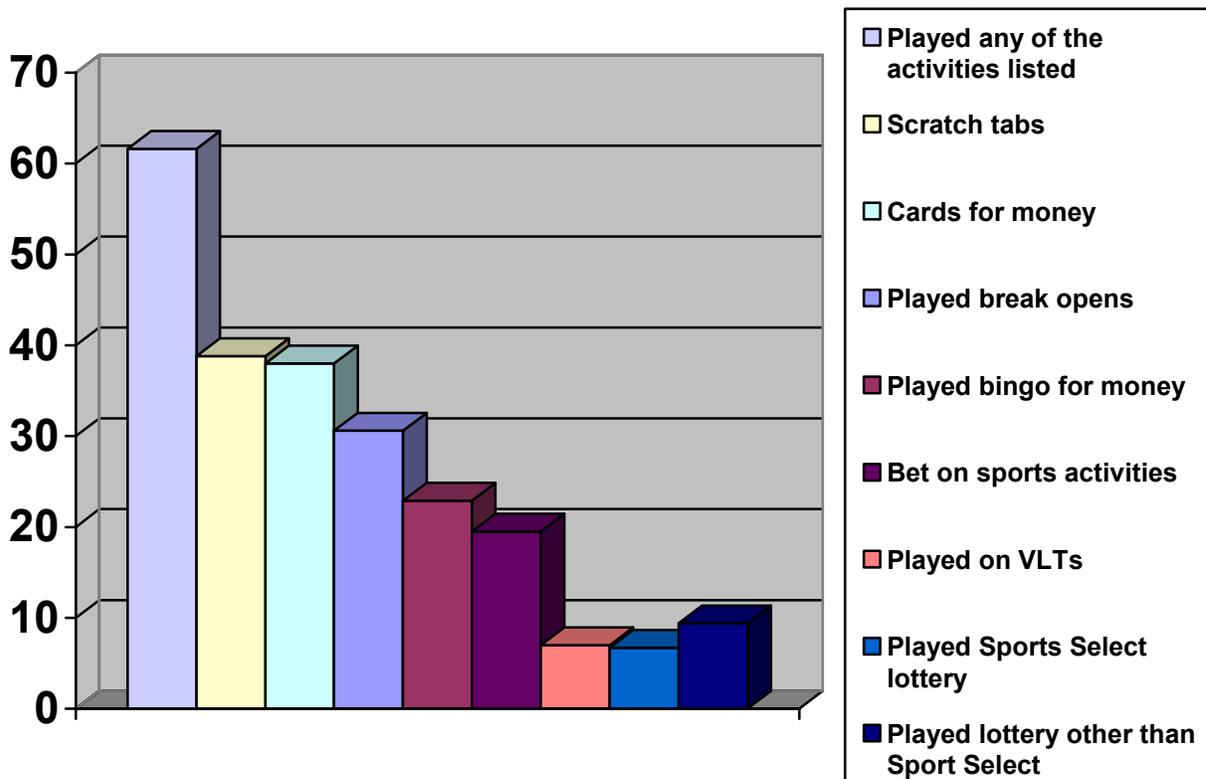


Poulin, Van Til, Elliott, 2007

## GAMBLING

- In 2007, 61.6% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador participated in at least one of eight gambling activities identified in the chart below, at least once in the previous 12 months.
- The most common reported gambling activities were scratch tabs (38.8%), cards for money (38.1%) and breakopens (30.6%). The least common reported activities were internet gambling for money, video lottery terminals, and Sports Select lottery.
- Males and females were equally likely to have played scratch tabs, breakopens, and bingo. Males were more likely than females to participate in the remaining gambling activities.
- In 2007, 3.6% of students met the definition of at-risk gambling while 1.7% met the definition of problem gambling.
- More males (2.9%) than females (0.4%) met the definition of problem gambling.
- Males (5.2%) were also more likely than females (1.9%) to meet the definition of at-risk gambling

Figure 12: Participation in gambling activities in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students



*“I only play scratch tabs and such when my parents buy them. I don’t do it myself, I just sometimes help them scratch them.”*

*-male, grade 7*

*“I’m addicted to gambling along with many of my friends. Stop the younger generation before it is to [sic] late like me. A night out: \$20 beer + \$10 smokes + \$10 week + \$20 gambling = \$60 for nothing to show the next day.”*

*- male, grade 12*

---

## MENTAL HEALTH

- In 2007, the student drug use survey reports on questions concerning students' mental health.
- 4.8% of Newfoundland and Labrador students scored as having "very elevated" depressive symptoms on a screening tool. 19.8% of students scored as having "somewhat elevated" depressive symptoms.
- Female students (25.8%) were about twice as likely as male students (14.0%) to report somewhat elevated depressive symptoms
- Female students (7.8%) were also more likely than male students (1.9%) to report very elevated depressive symptoms.
- Students in grade 7 were less likely than older students to report elevated depressive symptoms.
- In 2007, 4.3% of students scored positively on a screening tool for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. No gender differences were found.
- In 2007, 1.1% of students reported medical amphetamine use in the past 30 days. 2.0% reported medical use of methylphenidate (Ritalin or Concerta).

***"School is a stress time, along with relationships, broken hearts and family. This year has been a stressful one, so I'd just talk to someone for my stress and depression."***

***- female, grade 12***

***"Maybe you should do a survey on how many people may be dealing with teen depression, suicidal thoughts and self injury. And how many are afraid to see help or confess they are at risk."***

***- female, grade 12***

## HELP SEEKING

- In 2007, 1.9% of students felt they needed help for their alcohol use and 0.9% received such help.
- 4.5% of students felt they needed help for their cigarette smoking and 1.3% received such help.
- 2.8% of students felt they needed help for other substance use and 0.8% received such help.
- 15.6% of students felt they needed help for their depressive symptoms and 4.0% received such help. This represents the biggest gap between those who needed help and who actually received such help.

Figure 11: Help seeking behaviours by issue, in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007

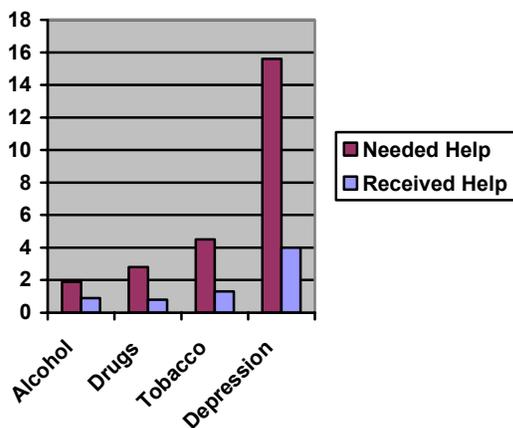
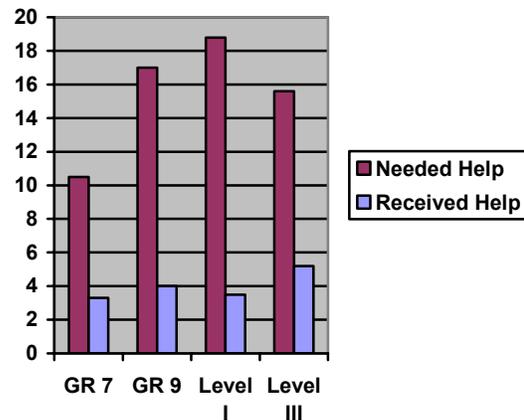


Figure 14: Help seeking behaviour for depressive symptoms, in the year before the survey, as percentages of all students, 2007



*“I think that there should be help for those who smoke, make quitting easier for those who do. In my school it seems like people are alright with those who smoke and teachers don’t really enforce or help those who do. It’s not really available here.”*  
- female, grade 10

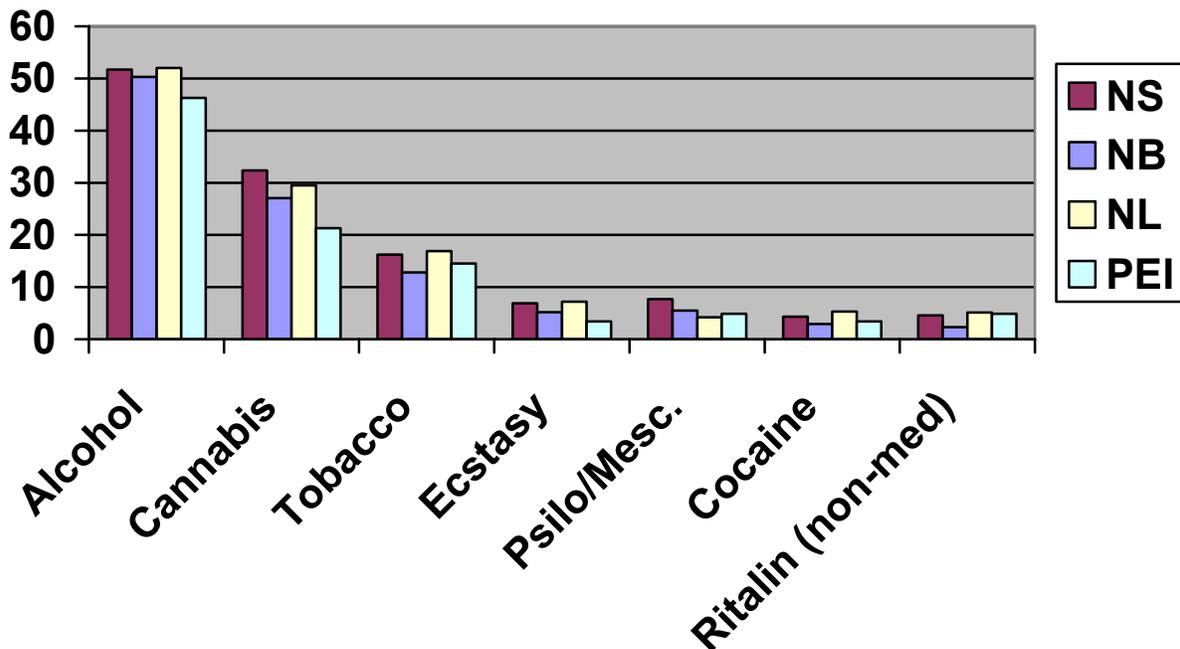
*“I think there needs to be a program of some sort put in place so we can help students with these problems, and we need more activities around town to keep us occupied so we can stay away from trouble.”*  
- female, grade 9

*I think there should be better counselling in schools. I would like to be counseld [sic] but I don’t know what to do. They should have signs saying “If you want to talk about ANYTHING come here anytime of the school day or after school.” Thanks.*  
- male, grade 9

## SUBSTANCE USE BY ADOLESCENT STUDENTS IN THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES

- In 2007, the substances most commonly used by students in grades 7, 9, 10 and 12 in the Atlantic provinces were alcohol (50.9%), cannabis (29.3%) and cigarettes (15.0%).
- In all Atlantic Provinces, there is a downward trend in students' use of cannabis and cigarettes with the latter showing the greatest decrease in prevalence.
- Students in Prince Edward Island reported the lower rates of alcohol, Ecstasy and LSD use compared to the other Atlantic Provinces.
- Students in New Brunswick reported the lower rates of smoking compared to the other Atlantic Provinces.
- Students living in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have lower rates of cannabis compared to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador
- In 2007, Nova Scotia had the highest rates of the use of psilocybin or mescaline.
- The 2007 survey revealed that, except for Ecstasy, the rates of adolescents' use of the various substances in the four Atlantic provinces were either lower than, or essentially the same as, those observed in 2002/2003.

Figure 12: Any substance use among adolescent students in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, as percentages, 2007



---

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the Student Drug Use Survey indicate that well over one third (41%) of students were alcohol, tobacco and other drug free in 2007. Students should continue to be supported in making healthy lifestyle choices.

While there are 5% more students who reported being substance use free in 2007 compared to 2003, there remains a large number of students who continue to use alcohol, cannabis and tobacco.

More than half (52%) of students reported alcohol use, almost one third (29.5%) used cannabis, while less than one fifth (16.9%) smoked cigarettes at least once in the 12 months before the survey.

While decreases were noted in all Atlantic Provinces, alcohol, cannabis and cigarettes are commonly used substances by adolescent students in all four Atlantic provinces. In 2007, Newfoundland and Labrador had fairly similar rates of alcohol, cannabis and tobacco use as the other Atlantic Provinces. Prince Edward Island had the lowest rate of both alcohol (46.3%) and cannabis (21.3%) use while New Brunswick had the lowest rate of cigarette use (12.8%).

In 2007, more than half (52%) of Newfoundland and Labrador students reported alcohol use compared to 57.9% in 2003. The use of alcohol more than once per month was reported by 31.1% of students and 29.7% reported consuming five or more drinks at one sitting in the 30 days prior to the survey. The use of alcohol by youth in this province continues to be an area of concern.

Cannabis use retains its rank as the second most commonly used substance by adolescent students in Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2007, 29.5% of students reported past year use compared to 34.5% in 2003. Despite the decrease from 2003, current cannabis use remains higher than the 1996 rate (22.8%).

In 2007, tobacco use continued its downward trend as fewer students smoked cigarettes than in any other survey year. 16.9% of students reported smoking in the course of the year, compared to 27.3% in 2003, 38.1% in 1998 and 35.7% in 1996.

This reduction in tobacco smoking may be attributed to factors such as the comprehensive Newfoundland and Labrador tobacco reduction strategy. Of the 16.9% of students who reported smoking in the course of the year, 64% reported an attempt to quit in the previous six months. Even though smoking rates have decreased, there remains cause for concern given one in six students in Newfoundland and Labrador reported tobacco use.

The only substance that showed a clear increase in use from 2003 to 2007 was Ecstasy. An increase was noted among students in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in Nova Scotia. This increase is cause for concern as this drug is known to be associated with considerable health risks.

This survey assessed adolescent gambling. In 2007, 61.6% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador participated in at least one gambling activity in the course of the year compared to 65% in 2003 and 74% in 1998. Given many problem gamblers report starting gambling as a teenager, this is a concern given the majority of students reported past year gambling activity.

---

Some students reported the use of more than one substance. In 2007, 11.8% reported having used alcohol, cigarettes and cannabis. This pattern of multiple substance use has decreased from 20% in 2003, 18% in 1998 and 23% in 1996. Multiple substance use is considered to be a high-risk behaviour as it is associated with a greater number of negative consequences.

There were no statistically significant differences between the use of any substances among male and female students with the exception of non-medical steroid use. Male students were more likely than female students to report non-medical steroid use.

The 2007 survey found that more senior high students used alcohol, tobacco and other drugs than junior high students. This underlies the importance of early intervention with younger adolescents in the junior high grades.

Using alcohol and other drugs was associated with risk-taking behaviours and harmful consequences. Students identified harmful consequences such as injuring themselves, damaging property, tensions with family or friends as well as impacts on academic performance. Risk behaviours included driving under the influence of alcohol or cannabis, being a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone who is under the influence, or engaging in unplanned sexual activity.

In 2007, 21.2% of students in grade 9, 35.1% in Level I, and 56.1% in Level III engaged in sexual intercourse. Of the students who had sexual intercourse, 35.3% had unplanned sexual intercourse under the influence of a substance on at least one occasion in the course of the year compared to 39% in 2003. Given the health and social

risks associated with sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy, continuation of sexual health education and its integration with substance use education and intervention is warranted.

In 2007, the Student Drug Use Survey reported on the mental health concerns of adolescent students. Among all students, 4.8% scored as having “very elevated” depressive symptoms while 19.8% scored as having “somewhat elevated” depressive symptoms. On a screening tool for Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder, 4.3% of students scored positively.

As these results show, a considerable proportion of adolescent students have mental health concerns. This highlights the importance of mental health promotion and prevention of mental health issues among this population.

It is also important to highlight that mental health and substance use can affect one another. Any substance use education and intervention must bear this in mind.

In conclusion, the interest in this study remains high given school participation and the student response rate. Collaboration with the other three Atlantic Provinces provides continued opportunity to gain insight into the prevalence and trends of student drug use, gambling and mental health. This information is useful in supporting healthy and safe lifestyles for the youth of Newfoundland and Labrador.

## UPDATE ON 2003 RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS	UPDATE
<p><b>1. Parents/guardians, schools, communities and government should work together to support adolescents making healthy decisions about substance use and gambling.</b></p>	<p>There is an established provincial prevention and education committee whose goal is to oversee the development of a prevention and education strategy as it pertains to substance use and gambling. This committee is made up of representatives from government and key stakeholders. It will work closely with regional networks in implementing community based prevention/education initiatives.</p>
<p><b>2. Resources should be strengthened to address substance use and gambling prevention, intervention and health promotion for youth.</b></p>	<p>Since 2003, there have been new initiatives to address the specific needs of youth. These include adolescent addictions counsellors, and an addictions prevention coordinator for each region as well as an Adolescent Day Treatment Program in St. John's.</p>
<p><b>3. Partnerships between education, health, justice and the community are needed to ensure that a full continuum of services is available to address adolescent substance abuse and/or gambling issues.</b></p>	<p>The provincial prevention and education committee includes representatives from education, health, justice and the community. The Departments of Health, Education and Justice have jointly funded a provincial Health, Education and Enforcement in Partnership (HEP) Coordinator whose role is to work with provincial and regional networks in addressing problematic substance use.</p>
<p><b>4. The findings of the 2003 Student Drug Use Survey should be communicated to key stakeholders throughout the province.</b></p>	<p>The 2003 Highlights Report was distributed widely to stakeholders in the province as well as posted to the Department of Health and Community Services website.</p>
<p><b>5. The standardized Student Drug Use Survey should be repeated in the Atlantic Provinces in a three to four year cycle.</b></p>	<p>The standardized survey has been repeated in 2007.</p>

---



---

## 2007 RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007 Newfoundland and Labrador Student Drug Use Survey represents the standardized approach to gathering information on alcohol, tobacco and *other* drug use among adolescent students across in Newfoundland and Labrador and has led to the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS	RATIONALE
<p><b>1. Continued support for resources relating to prevention initiatives addressing substance use among youth as well as early intervention initiatives that seek to help those adolescents experiencing negative consequences as a result of their choice to engage in substance use.</b></p>	<p>As shown, a large proportion of Newfoundland and Labrador’s youth choose not to engage in the harmful use of substances. The continued support of evidence based prevention, education and awareness programs will provide the necessary tools and information for these and other youth to continue to make responsible choices.</p> <p>Youth who are harmfully involved in substance use present a challenge to those responsible for helping them make healthier choices. Parents/guardians, schools, communities and governments should continue to support and educate students in making healthier decisions relating to their substance use. Early intervention initiatives should also be explored.</p>
<p><b>2. Standards, clear outcomes and associated measures should be established in the evaluation of initiatives addressing alcohol, tobacco and drug use.</b></p>	<p>The coordination of the standardized Student Drug Use Survey provides a unique opportunity for Atlantic Canada to monitor and evaluate addictions related health outcomes among adolescents. On the basis of shared information, inter-provincial collaboration can be formed to address some common identifiable problems.</p>
<p><b>3. The major findings of the 2007 Student Drug Use Survey should be communicated to key stakeholders throughout the province.</b></p>	<p>Students, parents/guardians, teachers, schools, communities, government agencies and policy makers should be informed about the trends in substance use among adolescents. Understanding these trends will help identify substance use related problems that will assist in the planning, resource allocation and implementation of effective prevention initiatives and treatment programs focused on addressing identified needs.</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS	RATIONALE
<p><b>4. The province should explore the option of age of majority legislation for gambling activities.</b></p>	<p>In 2007, 61.6% of students in Newfoundland and Labrador participated in at least one of eight gambling activities identified in the chart below, at least once in the previous 12 months. The most common gambling activity was scratch tabs (38.8%), cards for money (38.1%) and breakopens (30.6%). 3.6 % of students met the definition of at-risk gambling and 1.7% met the definition of problem gambling. Research shows that early exposure to gambling activities is one factor indicated in problem gambling among the adult population.</p> <p>Atlantic Lottery Corporation's age of majority policy states that you must be 19 years or older to purchase or redeem lottery products; play VLTs or purchase products on Playsphere. However, according to the survey, these products appear to be very accessible among students in this province.</p>
<p><b>5. The standardized Student Drug Use Survey should be repeated in the Atlantic provinces every three to four years.</b></p>	<p>The information gathered on the substance use patterns of students in Newfoundland and Labrador is an essential indicator to aid in the development of any approach to addressing adolescent substance use.</p>

---

---

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

If you require further information on alcohol, tobacco, other drug use or gambling, please contact **Addictions Services** at your Regional Health Authority.

For additional copies of the SDUS Summary Report, please contact:

Department of Health and  
Community Services  
Newfoundland and Labrador  
Confederation Building, West Block  
P. O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6  
Telephone: 709-729-3658

**Atlantic Provinces SDUS  
Principal Investigator:**  
Christiane Poulin  
Canada Research Chair in  
Population Health and Addictions  
Dalhousie University  
5790 University Avenue  
Halifax, NS B3H 1V7  
Christiane.Poulin@dal.ca

**For more information in the Atlantic Provinces, contact:**

**Newfoundland and Labrador:**  
Department of Health and  
Community Services  
1st Floor, Confederation Building  
P. O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL  
A1B 4J6

**Prince Edward Island:**  
Department of Health and  
Social Services  
P. O. Box 2000  
Charlottetown, PEI  
C1A 7N8

**New Brunswick:**  
Department of Health and  
Community Services  
P. O. Box 5100  
Carleton Place  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5G8

**Nova Scotia:**  
Nova Scotia  
Office of Health Promotion  
P. O. Box 488  
Halifax, NS  
B3J 2R8

