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# Survey looks at substance use, mental health, gambling among Indiana college students

Nov 29, 2023

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Indiana University researchers have released results from the 2023 [Indiana College Substance Use Survey](#), which gauges the use of substances like vaping products, tobacco, marijuana and alcohol among college students across the state. It also looks at the mental health of students, as well as gambling behaviors.

More than half of surveyed Indiana college students reported consuming alcohol in the past month. Marijuana was the second most frequently reported substance used by Indiana college students, with nearly one of four (24.1%) reporting marijuana use in the past month. And 37% of surveyed students indicated they've experienced significant sadness or hopelessness lasting two weeks or longer in the past year. (Because of the methodology used each year, researchers say they can't compare year-to-year data.)

“Knowing more about student behaviors and their mental health helps both college and state leaders gain a better understanding about student needs and can also help in the development of plans to improve the well-being of students across the state,” said Kaitlyn Reho, research associate with [Prevention Insights](#) at the Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington. “Each participating school receives their own campus-level report, so they can use the data to identify important issues they may need to prioritize on their campus.”

This is the [13th survey](#) conducted since 2009. Among the findings:

- One out of five surveyed students, 21.1%, reported using electronic vaping products in the past month. National data shows vaping has increased significantly over the past five years, in both college students and their non-college peers.
- More than half of students, 55.7%, reported drinking alcohol in the past month; 29.6% reported binge drinking in the past two weeks, which is defined as four or more drinks in one sitting for females, and five or more drinks in one sitting for males. These findings are similar to national data, which found that 62.5% of college students reported alcohol use in the past month and 27.7% reported binge drinking in the past two weeks.
- Students tend to overestimate the percentage of students at their school who consumed alcohol in the past month. Over half of students, 50.9%, perceived that 60 to 100% of students consumed alcohol in the past month. Research has found that perceptions of the frequency of peers' use of substances, including alcohol, is positively correlated with their own use of the substance.

Surveyed students were also asked how many days over the past month they felt their mental health was not good, including when they experienced stress, depression or problems with emotion. The average response was 9.3 days per month, and 27.9% of responding students said their mental health was poor on 15 days or more in the past month.

The survey also asked about the prevalence of suicidal ideation. Nearly 13% of responding students reported seriously considering attempting to die by suicide within the past year. Men reported the lowest prevalence of having serious thoughts of attempting suicide, at 9.6%, followed by women at 12.7% and students who identify as a gender other than man or woman at 34.7%.

“Students who experience poorer mental health are more at risk for experiencing adverse consequences, like substance use or decreased academic performance,” Reho said. “This data can help universities as they work to provide more mental health services and support on college campuses.”

When it came to gambling behavior, in the past year:

- More than one out of five students, 21.8%, reported playing the lottery, including scratch-off tickets.

- The second most frequent gambling behavior was making purchases in video games, such as loot boxes, at 10.3%.
- Of students who reported gambling in the past year, 59.1% indicated entertainment as their reason, 16.5% said it is a way to socialize, and 13.1% said they gamble for excitement.

Students who reported gambling in the past year and identify as a woman reported lower rates of consequences due to gambling (3.1%), compared to men (9.3%) and students who identified a gender other than man or woman (10.5%).

The most frequently cited consequence experienced was feeling bad about their gambling, at 8.5% overall, with women reporting the lowest prevalence at 5.2%, followed by men at 10.6%, and students who identify as a gender other than man or woman at 21.9%.

Twenty-two Indiana colleges participated in the 2023 Indiana College Substance Use Survey, which considered responses from 5,387 18- to 25-year-old students in spring 2023. It uses a convenience sampling methodology, and all Indiana colleges are invited to participate. Funding was provided by the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Mental Health and Addiction.

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