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The 2024 Delaware Epidemiological Profile

Substance Use, Mental Health, and Related Issues:

Marijuana



The Delaware 2024 Epidemiological Profile: Substance Use, Mental Health, and Related Issues

is prepared for

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Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health
&
The Delaware State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup

The annual Delaware State Epidemiological Profile is a valuable data resource for strategic planning, decision-making, and evaluation. The report includes modules that highlight indicators of mental health and wellbeing, patterns of substance use and its consequences, and risk and protective factors for people in Delaware. The report also highlights crosscutting issues that warrant attention as well as populations that may experience disproportionate risk for these concerns.

This module is part of a series of materials. To review the Annual Epidemiological Profile Companion Guide (which includes data notes), modules on additional topics, downloadable slides, and infographics, please visit the [UD Center for Drug and Health Studies Delaware Epidemiological Reports page](#). Links to presentations referenced in the annual profile are available from the [Presentations webpage](#).

The SEOW is facilitated by a team at the Center for Drug and Health Studies at the University of Delaware that convenes a network of more than 100 representatives from approximately 50 state and nonprofit agencies, community organizations, advocacy groups, and other entities. The SEOW's mission is to bring data on behavioral health and associated issues to the forefront of prevention and treatment efforts in Delaware. To learn more, please visit the [What is the SEOW?](#) webpage.



The annual Delaware Epidemiological Profile is a publication of the Delaware State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) project. Funding for the SEOW has been provided by the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health through funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Please address all inquiries to M.J. Scales, MPH, CPS, University of Delaware [Center for Drug and Health Studies](#), Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice: mjscales@udel.edu.



Marijuana

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Marijuana

Over the past two decades, many states have enacted laws that change the legal status of marijuana. According to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), 38 states (including Delaware), the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands allow for the medical use of cannabis products. In April 2023, Delaware joined several dozen states and U.S. territories, including neighboring Maryland and New Jersey, in legalizing the recreational use of marijuana by adults. As the laws have changed around the use of marijuana, the public perception of its risks has decreased. At the same time, the amount of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive component of marijuana, has increased considerably (ElSohly et al., 2016; NASEM, 2017).

Research suggests that marijuana use at an early age poses risks to brain development, cognitive functioning, and more frequent and heavier use in later life (Weir, 2015; Lisdahl et al., 2013; Gruber et al., 2017). But as the following data suggests, marijuana remains a popular substance among youth as well as adults.

This module presents an overview of marijuana use in Delaware based on the following data sources:

- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)
- Delaware School Survey (DSS)
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

National Survey on Drug Use and Health¹

The [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) (NSDUH) annually provides a report with U.S. estimates and state comparisons for major substance use and mental health indicators. NSDUH findings estimate that around one in seven Delawareans age 12 and over used marijuana in the past month (14.13%) and nearly one in five used it in the past year (19.99%). Although rates are lowest among the 12-to-17 year olds, more than one in ten report past year marijuana use and 6.46% report past month use. The highest rates are reported among the 18-to-25 year age group, with 28.36% reporting past month use and nearly four in ten reporting past year use. This group is also least likely to perceive great risk of regular marijuana use (9.39%).

Marijuana use and perceptions of great risk in Delaware by age group: Model-based prevalence estimates from NSDUH ² , 2021 and 2022 (in percentages)				
Measure	Total 12 or Older	AGE GROUP		
		12-17	18-25	26 or Older
Marijuana				
Past year marijuana use	19.99	10.77	38.92	18.38
Past month marijuana use	14.13	6.46	28.36	13.00
Perceived great risk of smoking marijuana once a month	18.71	18.16	9.39	20.05

Figure 1: Marijuana use and perceptions of great risk in Delaware by age group, NSDUH 2021 and 2022

¹ Source: [Interactive NSDUH State Estimates](#). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Estimates from 2021-2022 are not comparable to estimates from previous years due to changes in NSDUH survey methodology. Users can [explore the data online](#).

² Estimates are based on a survey-weighted hierarchical Bayes estimation approach and generated by Markov Chain Monte Carlo techniques.

Delaware School Survey (DSS)³

The [Delaware School Surveys \(DSS\)](#) are state-funded annual surveys administered to 5th, 8th, and 11th grade students in traditional public schools in Delaware. There are two versions of the survey, one for 5th grade students and a secondary version for 8th and 11th graders. The DSS are designed to provide estimates of youth substance use, including marijuana, and related factors. DSS data are used for National Outcomes Measures as well as state and local program planning and evaluation.⁴

The charts in this section highlight select data from the 2023 DSS.

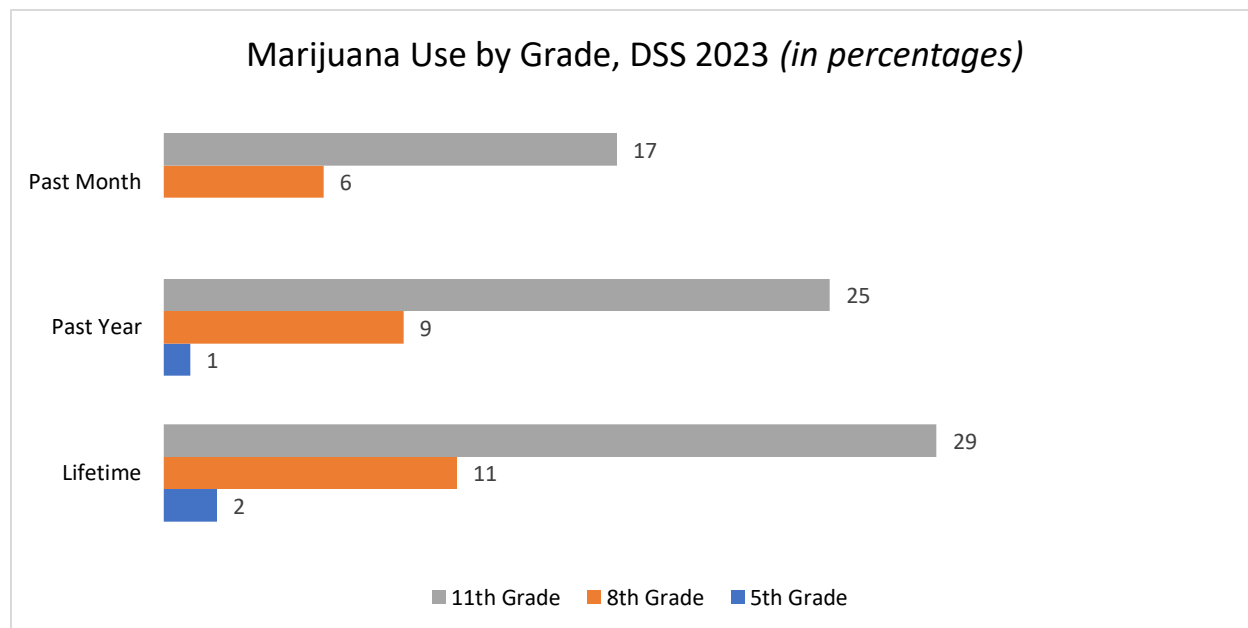


Figure 2: Marijuana use by grade, DSS 2023

According to the most recent DSS findings, nearly three in ten 11th grade students (29%) have used marijuana at least once in their lifetime and one in four have used marijuana in the past year. In 2023, they also reported a 17% past month use rate, the same as their reported rate for past month alcohol use. In 2023, more than one in ten 8th graders (11%) reported using marijuana at some point in their lifetime and over one in twenty (6%) reported using marijuana in the past month. The same year, 2% of 5th graders reported using marijuana at least once in their lifetime and 1% reported past year use.⁵

³ Source: Center for Drug & Health Studies. (2023). [Delaware School Surveys](#). University of Delaware.

⁴ For more information or to review the survey questionnaires and earlier reports, visit the [DSS page of the University of Delaware Center for Drug and Health Studies website](#). Due to the data gap in 2020 as well as the changes in the administration methodology related to the COVID-19 pandemic, results of the 2023 DSS should be compared with caution to previous survey results. For more information regarding pandemic impacts on school survey data collected by CDHS, readers can visit the Companion Guide that accompanies this profile accessible from the [Epidemiological Reports and Products page](#).

⁵ Prevalence rates are not available for any group if the number of respondents in a cell is below the CDHS threshold for data reporting (less than 30 students). Therefore, past month rates of marijuana use are not available for 5th grade students responding to the 2023 DSS.

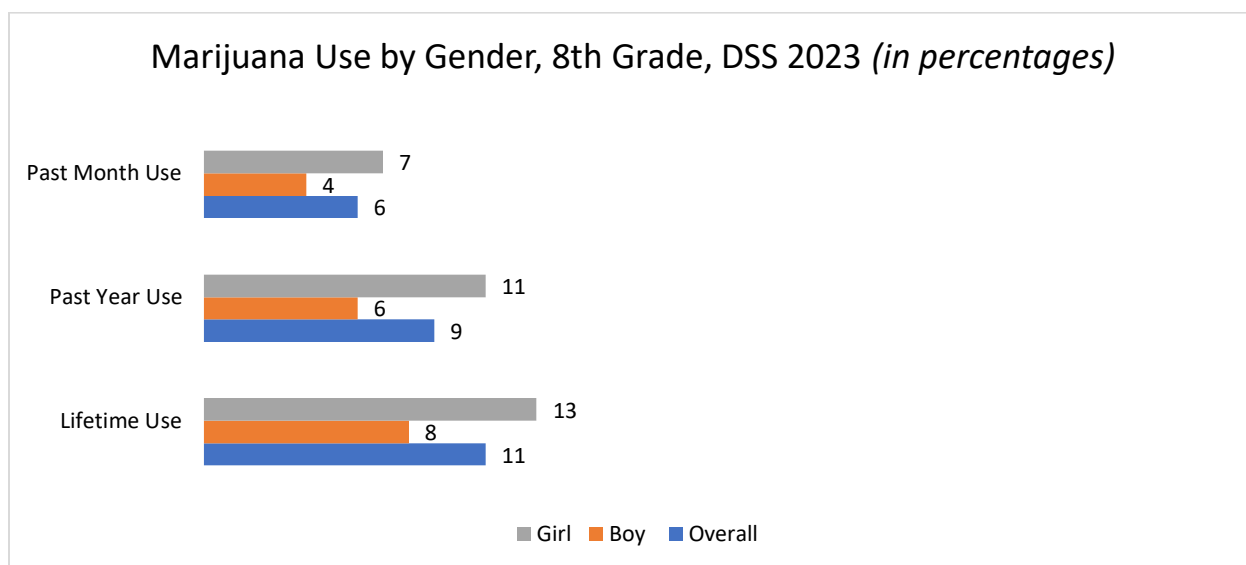


Figure 3: Marijuana use by gender⁶, 8th grade, DSS 2023

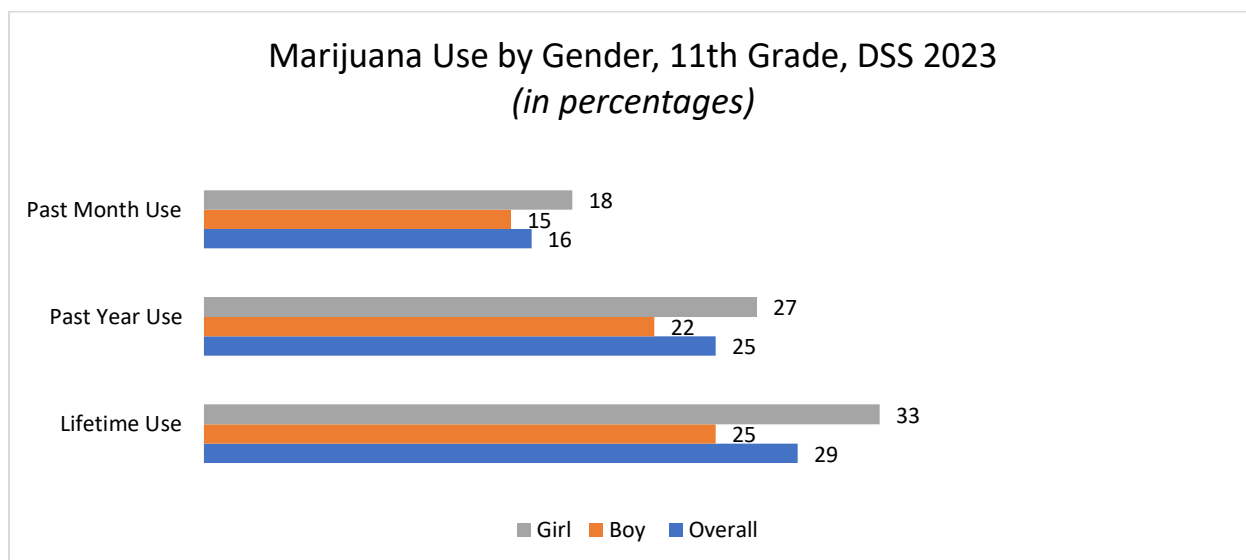


Figure 4: Marijuana use by gender, 11th grade, DSS 2023

In terms of gender, girls report higher rates of lifetime, past year, and past month use at both 8th and 11th grade levels.⁷

⁷ Although the 2023 DSS Secondary survey allows students to identify their gender as boy, girl, nonbinary, or to self-describe their gender, the numbers of nonbinary students and those who self-describe who also report marijuana use at the lifetime, past month, and past year time frames did not meet the statistical threshold for data reporting (less than 30 students). Therefore, these rates are unavailable. For more detailed information about nonbinary and transgender students in the DSS, please visit the module on Gender and Sexuality.

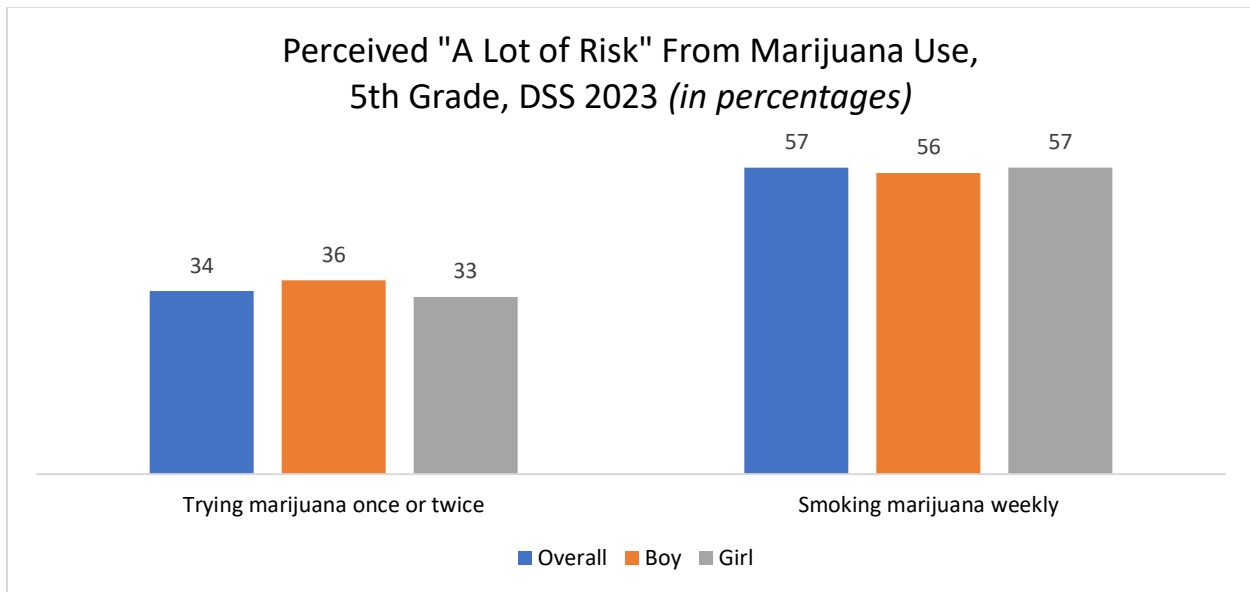


Figure 5: Perceived risk from marijuana use, 5th grade, DSS 2023

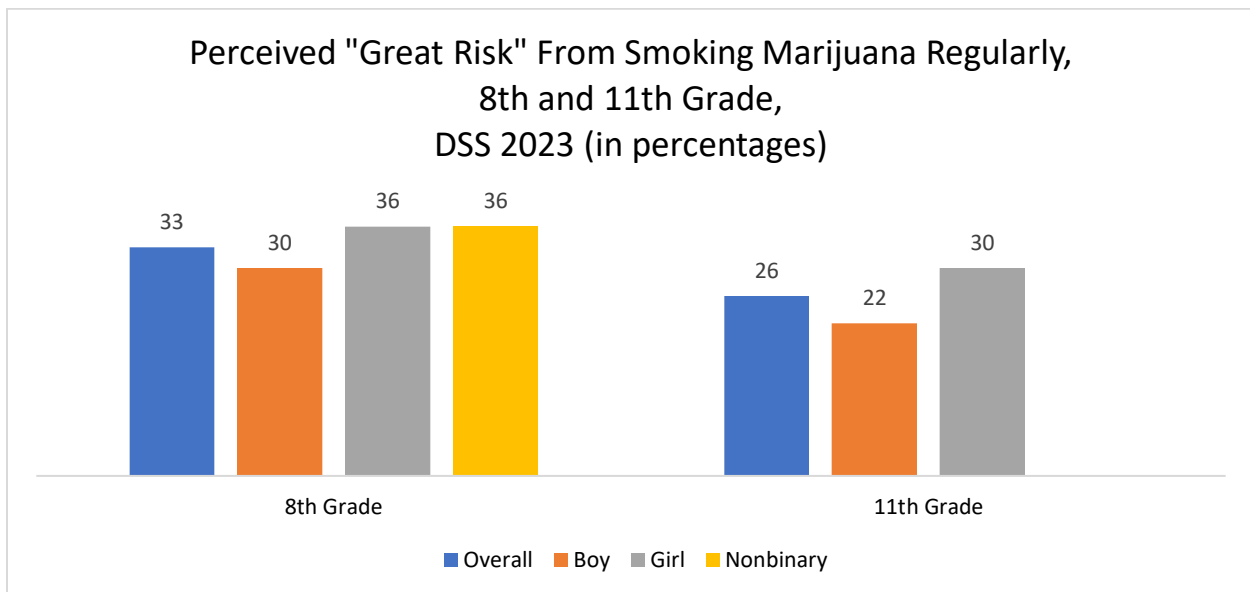


Figure 6: Perceived risk from marijuana use, 8th and 11th grade, DSS 2023

Students' perception of risk appears to decrease over time. One in three 8th grade students perceive a great risk associated with regularly marijuana use compared to approximately one in four 11th graders (26%).⁸

⁸ Data reported by gender here reflects three primary DSS categories (boy, girl, and nonbinary/self-describe) and students' responses are reported by their self-identified gender. As a result, the categories of "boy" and "girl" may include both cisgender and transgender students. Prevalence rates are unavailable for 11th grade students who identify as nonbinary or self-describe due to numbers of responses for this group being below the threshold for data reporting (less than 30 students).

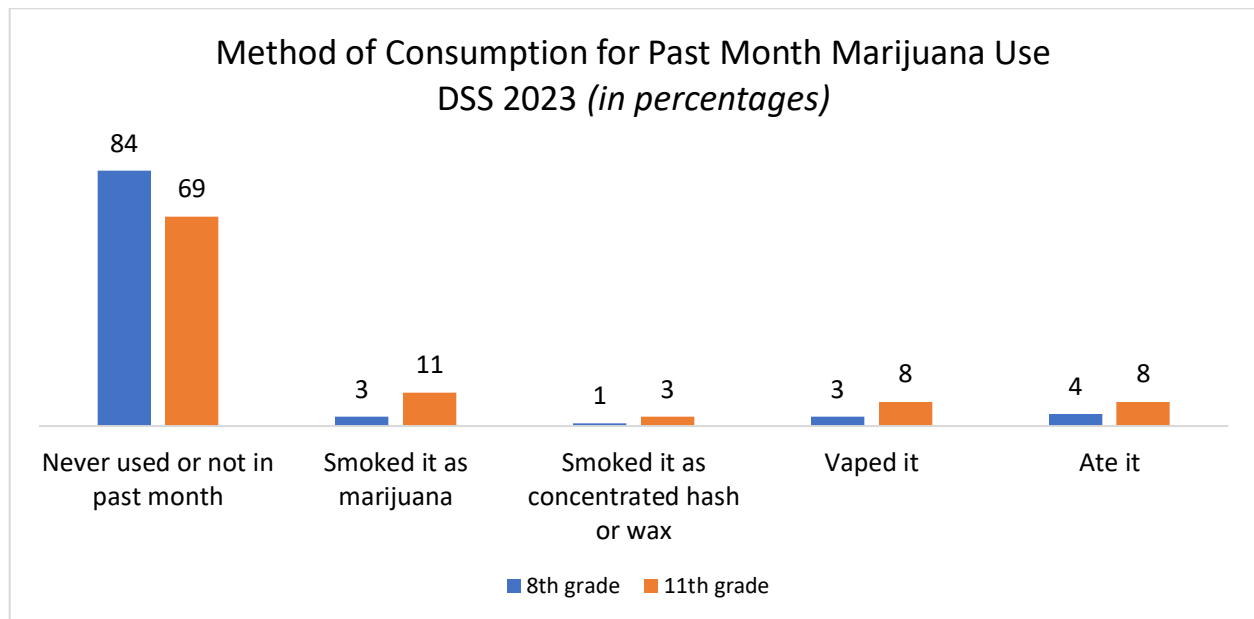


Figure 7: Method of consumption for marijuana use, 8th and 11th grade, DSS 2023

Note: Respondents were able to choose multiple methods of consumption. Thus, each category represents the percentage of total respondents who reported participating in each method of consumption.

Students reported consuming marijuana using a number of methods, with smoking being the most common, followed by eating it and vaping it.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)⁹

The [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) is a CDC-funded survey that is administered in odd-numbered years to both national and state samples of students. The survey monitors various topics of health risk behaviors, including substance use. Delaware has participated in these surveys for over 20 years. The following charts illustrate findings from the 2021 administration of the Delaware YRBS.¹⁰

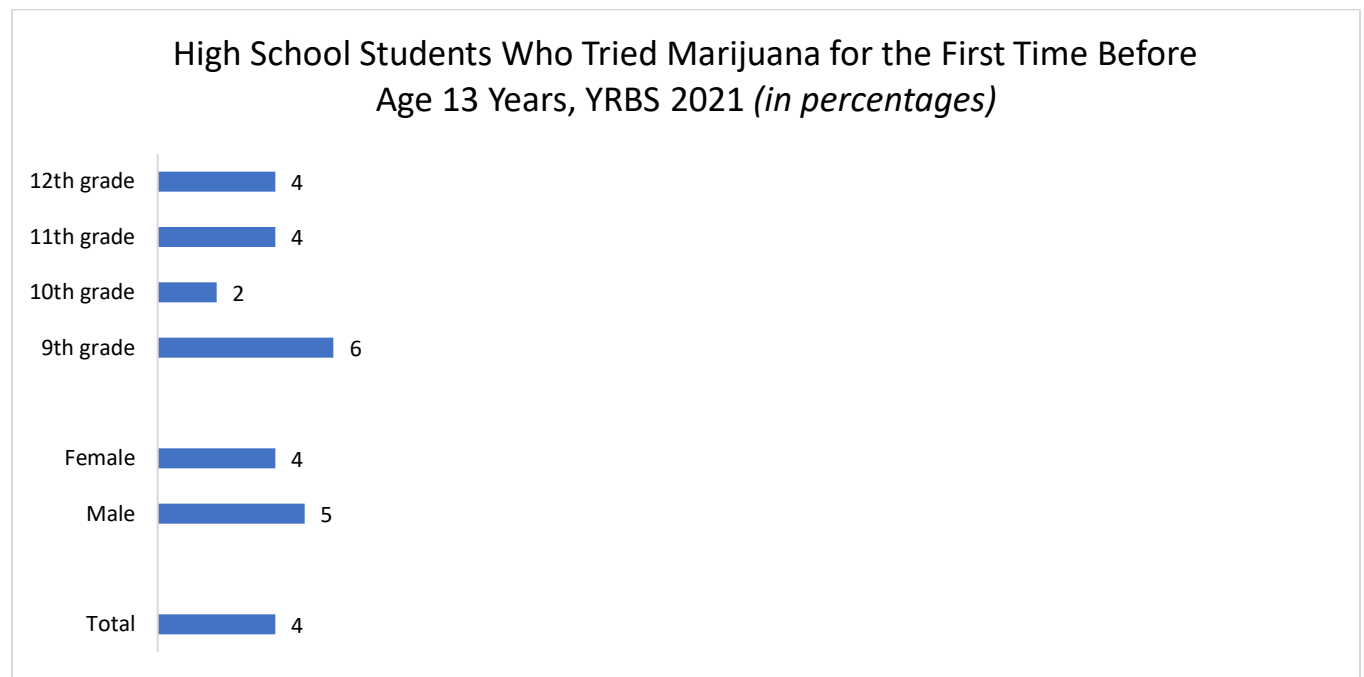


Figure 8: High school students who tried marijuana before age 13, YRBS 2021

According to the 2021 YRBS, 1 in 25 Delaware high school students report that they tried marijuana for the first time before becoming a teen.

Approximately one in six high school students report past month marijuana use. The rate is highest among seniors (24%).

⁹ Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991 – 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <https://nccd.cdc.gov/Youthonline/App/Default.aspx>.

¹⁰ Until the 2023 YRBS data is analyzed, comparisons of the 2021 data to previous data should be avoided, as findings from the 2021 data may be an exception to ongoing trends. For a more detailed description of pandemic impacts on data collection as it pertains to the YRBS, please refer to the Companion Guide accompanying this report and available online on the [Epidemiological Reports and Products page](#).

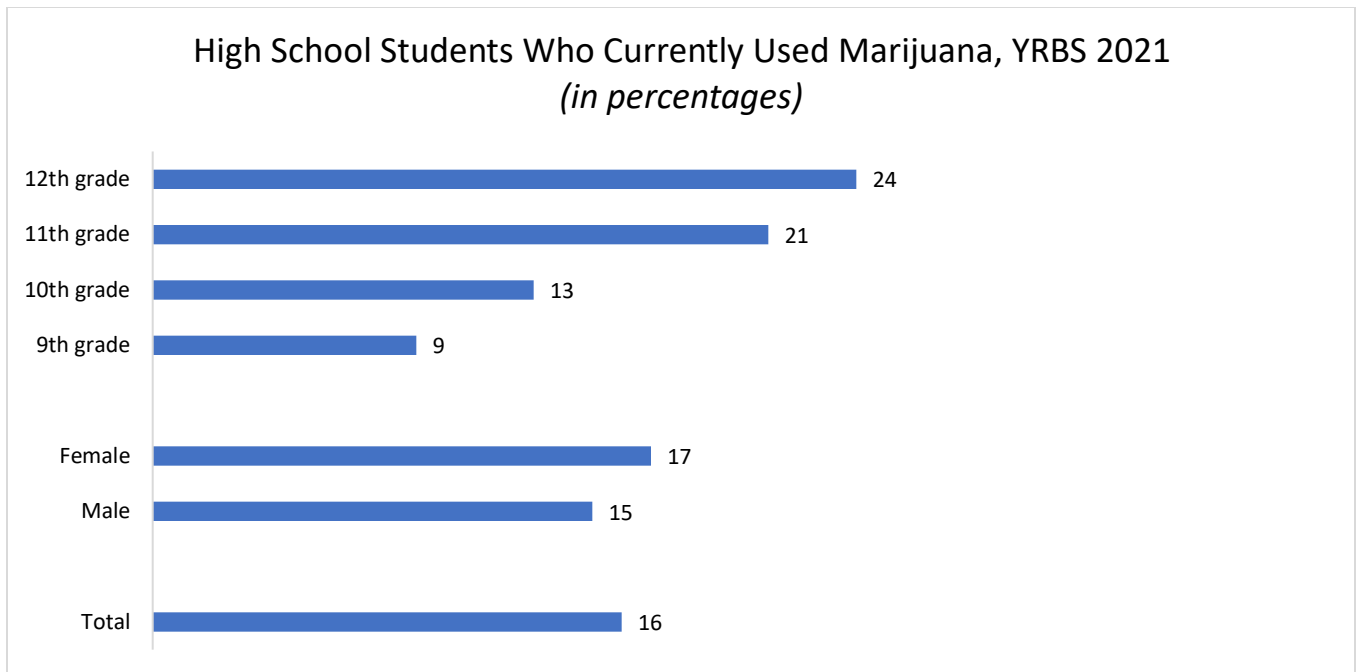


Figure 9: High school students who currently used marijuana¹¹, YRBS 2021

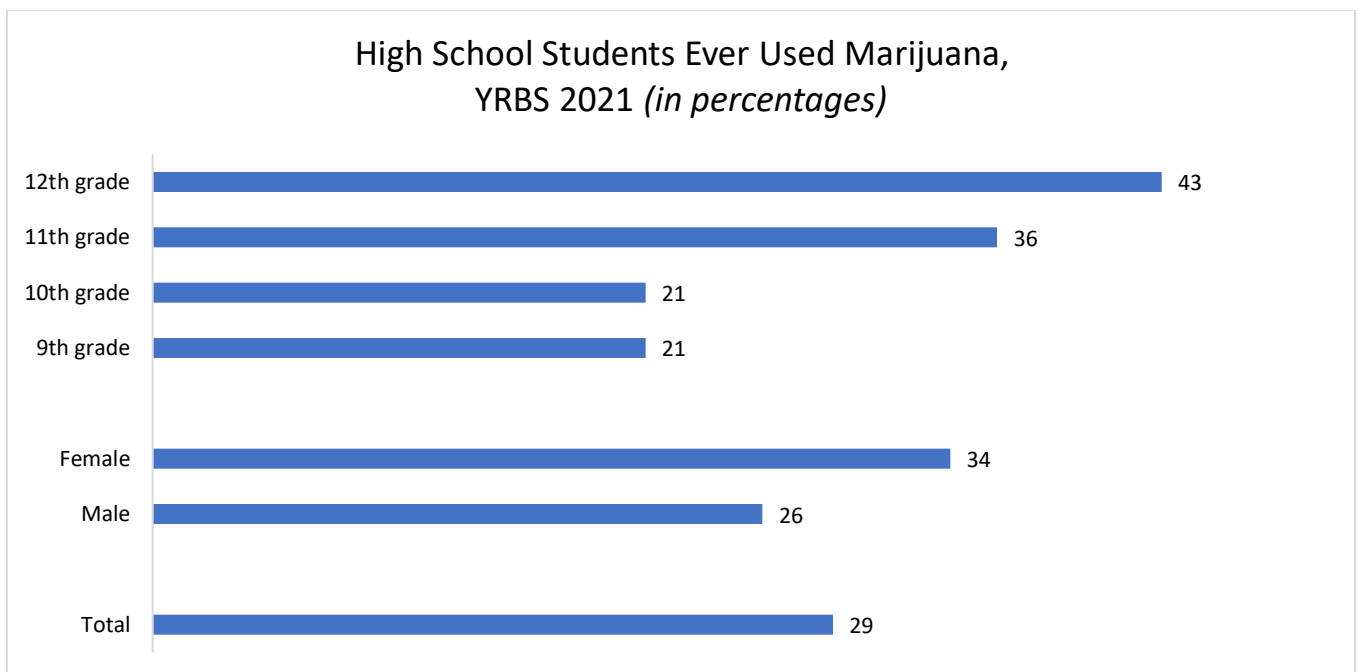


Figure 10: High school students who ever used marijuana, YRBS 2021

¹¹ Currently used marijuana is defined in the YRBS as using marijuana on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey.

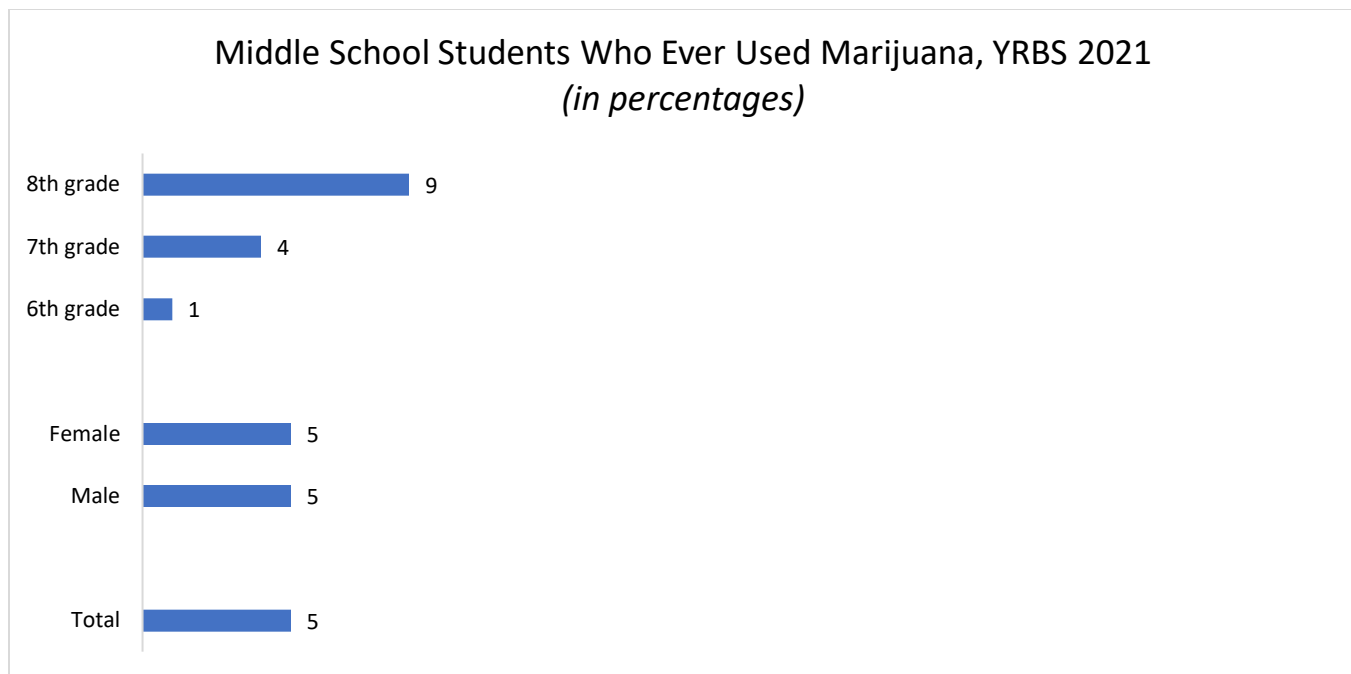


Figure 11: Middle school students who ever used marijuana, YRBS 2021

One in 20 middle school students, including 9% of 8th graders, report that they had used marijuana at least once in their lifetime.

Marijuana Policy Updates

In April 2023, recreational marijuana became legal in Delaware after [House Bill 1](#) became law without the Governor's signature. The Act "...removes all penalties for use or possession of a personal use quantity of marijuana and marijuana accessories. It further specifies that the adult sharing of a personal use quantity or less of marijuana is legal activity for those 21 years of age or older and that those 21 or older may possess, use, display, purchase, or transport accessories and personal use quantities of marijuana without penalty...." Personal use quantities are up to one ounce of leaf marijuana or the "equivalent amounts of marijuana products in other forms." [House Bill 2](#), also enacted without the Governor's signature, provides for the establishment of a "legal, regulated marijuana industry" in Delaware. On July 17th, 2024, the Governor signed into law [House Bill 334](#) which made technical and logistical corrections including definitions for various terms, hours of operation for marijuana facilities, changes to application selection process, etc. to the Delaware Marijuana Control Act.

References and Data Sources

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