In Canada, substance use generally peaks during young adulthood. Young adults attending a postsecondary institution have a range of new experiences during this life stage. Through the 2019–2020 Canadian Postsecondary education Alcohol and Drug use Survey (CPADS), Health Canada collected data on the prevalence and patterns of substance use and associated harms among postsecondary students aged 17–25 across Canada.

Which substances do students use?

**Alcohol**

- **How often was alcohol consumed in the past month?**
  - At least once/week: 23%
  - 2–3 times in past month: 12%
  - Once in past month: 24%
  - Not in past month: 40%

- **77%** consumed alcohol in the past month
- **40%** of students consumed alcohol frequently (at least once/week), while **23%** did not consume alcohol in the past month
- Postsecondary students drank more than recommended by Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines; **21%** of students who consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey, exceeded the guidelines for chronic health effects
- **On a typical drinking day in the past month, students consumed 4.5 drinks on average**
- **On their heaviest drinking day in the past month, students consumed 6.9 drinks on average**

**Cannabis**

- **How often was cannabis used in the past month?**
  - Daily/almost daily: 67%
  - Weekly: 17%
  - Monthly: 5%
  - Not in past month: 3%

- **33%** used cannabis in the past month
- **8%** used cannabis on a daily basis (5+ days per week)

**Other substances**

- **15%** had used a pain reliever, stimulant, sedative or over-the-counter medication in a problematic way in the past year
- **15%** used an illegal drug (e.g. cocaine, heroin) in the past year
- **2%** reported daily tobacco use and **17%** used an e-cigarette or vaped nicotine, cannabis or flavouring in the past month

Harms related to alcohol use

- Among students who drank alcohol within the past year, **56%** experienced at least one of 24 different harms from their alcohol use in the past month, most often physical harms

Driving and substance use

- **Among students who used consumed alcohol in the past 12 months, 9% drove within two hours of consuming at least two drinks**

- **Among students who used cannabis in the past 12 months, 17% drove within two hours of smoking or vaporizing cannabis**

SOURCE:
2. Problematic use of psychoactive pharmaceuticals includes using opioid pain relievers, stimulants, sedatives or over-the-counter medication, in a larger dose, using more frequently than recommended or to get high.

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