

Alcohol and Other Drug Use and Academic Achievement

What is the relationship between alcohol and other drug use and academic achievement?

Data presented below from the 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) show a negative association between alcohol and other drug use and academic achievement after controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level. This means that students with higher grades are less likely to engage in alcohol and other drug use behaviors than their classmates with lower grades, and students who do not engage in alcohol and other drug use behaviors receive higher grades than their classmates who do engage in alcohol and other drug use behaviors. These associations do not prove causation. Further research is needed to determine whether low grades lead to alcohol and other drug use, alcohol and other drug use leads to low grades, or some other factors lead to both of these problems.

Students with higher grades are significantly less likely to have engaged in behaviors such as

- **Current alcohol use** (having at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- **Binge drinking** (having five or more drinks of alcohol in a row within a couple of hours on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- **Drinking alcohol for the first time before age 13 years** (other than a few sips).
- **Current marijuana use** (using marijuana one or more times during the 30 days before the survey).
- **Ever taking prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription** (taking prescription drugs [e.g., OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Adderall, Ritalin, or Xanax] without a doctor's prescription one or more times during their life).
- **Ever using ecstasy** (using ecstasy [also called MDMA] one or more times during their life).

Percentage of high school students who engaged in alcohol and other drug use, by type of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D's/F's)—United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009*

Alcohol and Other Drug Use	Percentage of U.S. high school students who engaged in each risk behavior, by type of grades mostly earned			
	A's	B's	C's	D's/F's
Alcohol Use				
Ever drank alcohol (had at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during their life)	63	74	80	87
Current alcohol use (had at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	32	43	51	62
Binge drinking (had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row within a couple of hours on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	17	25	30	46
Drank alcohol for the first time before age 13 years (other than a few sips)	14	19	28	41
Drank alcohol on school property (had at least one drink of alcohol on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey)	2	3	6	17
Marijuana Use				
Ever used marijuana (used marijuana one or more times during their life)	21	37	50	66
Current marijuana use (used marijuana one or more times during the 30 days before the survey)	10	19	30	48
Tried marijuana for the first time before age 13 years	3	5	12	24
Used marijuana on school property (one or more times during the 30 days before the survey)	2	3	6	17
Other Drug Use				
Ever took prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription (took prescription drugs [e.g., OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Adderall, Ritalin, or Xanax] without a doctor's prescription one or more times during their life)	13	19	26	41
Ever used cocaine (used any form of cocaine [e.g., powder, crack, or freebase] one or more times during their life)	3	5	9	20
Current cocaine use (used any form of cocaine [e.g., powder, crack, or freebase] one or more times during the 30 days before the survey)	1	2	3	13
Ever injected illegal drugs (used a needle to inject any illegal drug into their body one or more times during their life)	1	1	2	9
Ever used inhalants (sniffed glue, breathed the contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaled any paints or sprays to get high one or more times during their life)	7	11	14	27
Ever took steroids without a doctor's prescription (took steroid pills or shots without a doctor's prescription one or more times during their life)	2	2	4	12
Ever used hallucinogenic drugs (used hallucinogenic drugs [e.g., LSD, acid, PCP, angel dust, mescaline, or mushrooms] one or more times during their life)	4	7	10	23
Ever used heroin (used heroin [also called smack, junk, or China White] one or more times during their life)	2	2	2	10
Ever used methamphetamines (used methamphetamines [also called speed, crystal, crank, or ice] one or more times during their life)	2	3	5	14
Ever used ecstasy (used ecstasy [also called MDMA] one or more times during their life)	3	5	9	21
Offered, sold, or given an illegal drug by someone on school property (during the 12 months before the survey)	15	22	27	44

* All associations are significant at $p < 0.0001$, using logistic regression and controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

Figure 1. Percentage of high school students who currently drank alcohol, drank alcohol for the first time before age 13 years, had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking), and drank alcohol on school property, by type of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D's/F's)—United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009

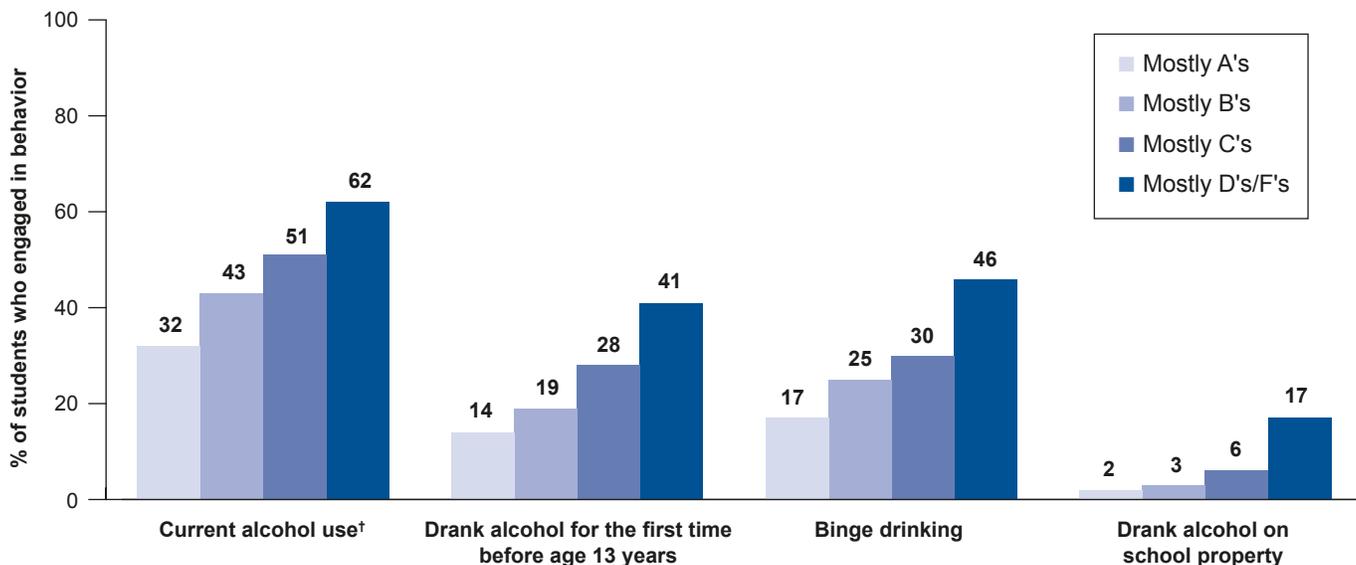
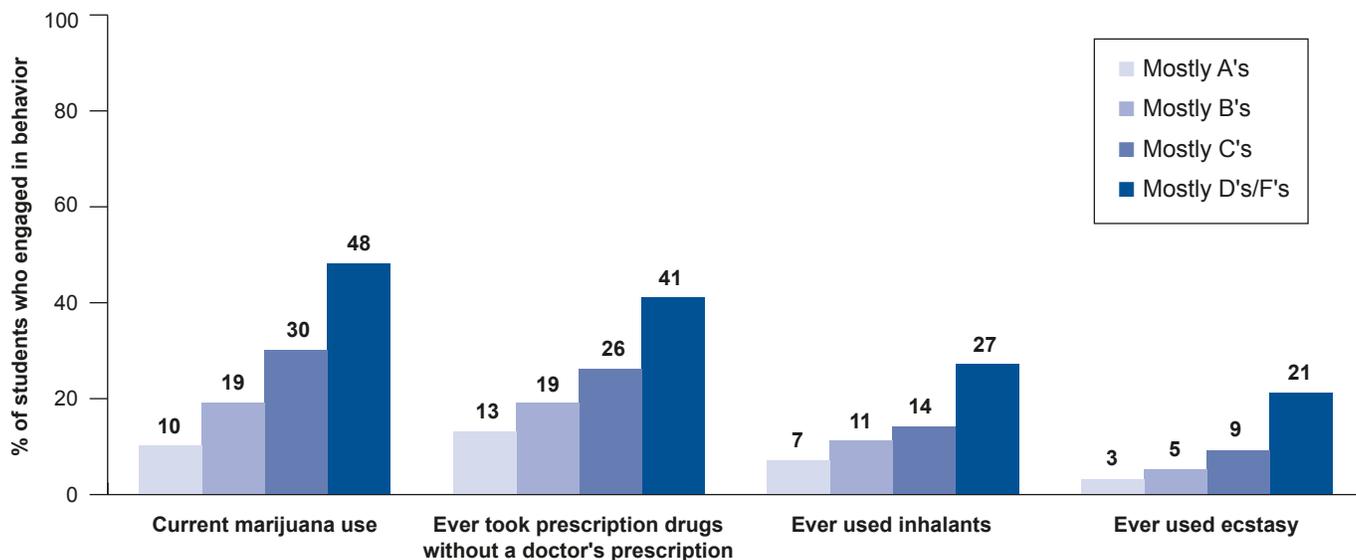


Figure 2. Percentage of high school students who currently use marijuana, and used prescription drugs, inhalants, and ecstasy during their lifetime, by type of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D's/F's)—United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009



[†] This means that 32% of students with mostly A's currently used alcohol and 62% of students with mostly D's or F's currently used alcohol.

The national YRBS monitors priority health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. It is conducted every 2 years during the spring and provides data representative of 9th- through 12th-grade students in public and private schools throughout the nation. In 2009, students completing the YRBS were asked, "During the past 12 months, how would you describe your grades in school?" and given seven response options (Mostly A's, Mostly B's, Mostly C's, Mostly D's, Mostly F's, None of these grades, Not sure). In 2009, 31% of students received mostly A's, 40% received mostly B's, 19% received mostly C's, 6% received mostly D's or F's, and 4% reported receiving none of these grades or not sure.

For more information visit www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).



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