

Briefing

Key Facts about 11 to 15 year olds and Drugs

We often assume we know what children and young people's use of drugs are. This briefing is intended to give the reader the current best knowledge at a glance.

Drugs remain a serious issue for young people in England, which is why the Drug Education Forum believes drug education must remain a priority for parents, schools, youth services and young people themselves.

It is encouraging that despite higher numbers of young people being offered illegal drugs that the headline figures for those using all drugs are stable, or even falling slightly, but there is no room for complacency.

The Drug Education Forum calls on the government to fund drug education training across the children's workforce. Teachers, youth workers, social workers and police officers working with children and young people would particularly benefit from this.

In the last year young people have highlighted the need for greater alcohol and tobacco education. Since early first use of alcohol and tobacco is associated with problematic drug use in adult life it is important that we listen to these messages.

The Drug Education Forum is the umbrella organisation for over 20 national bodies with unrivalled expertise in the field of drug education for children and young people in England. We promote the provision of effective universal drug education for all children and young people.

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DEF members: Adfam, Association of Chief Police Officers, Association of School and College Leaders, Association of Teachers and Lecturers, The Children's Society, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, Drug Education Practitioners Forum, DrugScope, Hope UK, Life Education Centres, Local Government Association, Mentor UK, National Association of Head Teachers, NASUWT, National Association of Youth and Community Education Officers, National Children's Bureau, National Health Education Group, NSCoPSE - the National PSE Association, NSPCC, National Union of Teachers, National Youth Agency, Professional Association of Teachers (PAT), and Tacade.



The Drug Education Forum

www.drugeducationforum.com

Alcohol

- In 2005, 42% of 11–15 year olds had **never** had a drink
 - The proportion of boys who have never drunk alcohol has risen from 35% in 1988 and 1990 to 43% in 2005.
 - The proportion of girls who have not had a drink varied between 38% and 44% in the same period and was 40% in 2005.
- Fewer than 1 in 4 of all 11- 15 year olds have drunk alcohol in the last week
- Only 3% of 11 year olds have drunk alcohol in the last week; this rises to 46% of 15 year olds.
- In 2004 most (60%) alcohol was consumed in the home. With parents (27%) and friends (27%) being the most common suppliers.

Smoking

- Fewer than 1 in 10 of all 11 - 15 year olds smoke regularly (at least one cigarette per week).
 - Only 1% of 11 year olds smoke regularly
 - 1 in 5 of 15 year olds smoke regularly
- Girls are more likely to smoke than boys (10% and 7% respectively).
- In 2004 43% of regular smokers who had smoked for more than a year want to give up.
- In 2004 89% felt their families would disapprove of them smoking.
- 52% of those who have tried to buy cigarettes from shops have been refused at least once.

Illegal Drugs

- Fewer than 1 in 5 11 - 15 year olds have had an illegal drug in the last year. This is slightly up on the 2004 figure but lower than the three preceding years.
- 1 in 10 had taken an illegal drug in the last month
- Among 11 year olds, 6% had taken drugs in the year, while 34% of 15 year olds had taken drugs in the last year.

- 1% of pupils aged 11 to 15 usually took drugs on most days, a further 2% took drugs at least once a week, and a further 3% took drugs once or twice a month.
- 12% of pupils took cannabis in the last year (down from 13% in 2001–2003).
- 4% had taken any Class A drug
- The prevalence of taking cannabis in the last year increased with age from 1% of 11 year olds to 26% of 15 year olds. Similarly, the prevalence of taking Class A drugs increased from less than 0.5% of 11 year olds to 8% of 15 year olds. Sniffing glue and other volatile substances are not strongly related to age, and was more common among 11 and 12 year old pupils than taking cannabis.

Volatile Substances

- In 2005, 7% of pupils reported having sniffed volatile substances such as glue, gas aerosols or solvents in the last year (up by 1% on 2004) and 4% reported sniffing poppers in the last year.
- Among 11 and 12 year olds, misuse of volatile substances was more common than taking cannabis
- 4% of 11 year olds had sniffed volatile substances in the last year and 1% had taken cannabis. Equivalent figures for 12 year olds were 6% and 3%.
- Of the 9 VSA deaths in under-18 year olds in 2003, 6 were associated with butane cigarette lighter refills, the sale of which to under-18s is prohibited by legislation. The numbers for 2002 were 24 deaths of which and 15 were caused by butane.

Drug Education and School Drug Policy

- In 2004 almost all schools reported that they taught pupils about drugs, tobacco and alcohol. Ninety five per cent of schools had policies on teaching about drugs, and 43% had updated their policies in the last year.
- 58% of pupils can recall having a lesson on tobacco in the last year, 58% can recall having a lesson on drugs, and 52% can recall a lesson about alcohol.
- In 63% of schools smoking was prohibited anywhere on school premises.

Data for this briefing comes from:

- “Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England 2005” which is available from the [Health and Social Care Information Centre](#).

- “Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England 2004” which is available from the [Department of Health’s website](#).
- “Trends in Death Associated With Abuse of Volatile Substances 1971-2003” which can be downloaded from [Volatile Substance Abuse Mortality Study website](#).