

Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey, 2017

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According to the 2017 Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CTADS), similar proportions of Canadians aged 15 and older reported currently smoking cigarettes (15%) or consuming cannabis in the past 12 months (15%). The percentages reporting having consumed alcohol, cannabis, tobacco and other illegal drugs tended to be higher among males and those aged 20 to 24.

Given that the *Cannabis Act* (C-45) officially came into effect on October 17, 2018, CTADS is an important source of information to examine cannabis consumption in Canada prior to legalization and regulation. CTADS and the National Cannabis Survey were the last national surveys conducted by Statistics Canada prior to the legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Detailed findings from CTADS can also be found on the [Health Canada](#) website, the organization sponsoring the survey.

Prior to legalization, over one in seven Canadians reported using cannabis—equivalent to the proportion who reported smoking cigarettes

Use of alcohol, cigarettes, cannabis and other illegal drugs varies widely among Canadians aged 15 and older.

According to CTADS 2017, similar proportions of Canadians reported currently smoking cigarettes (15% or nearly 4.6 million) or reported consuming cannabis in the past 12 months (15% or nearly 4.4 million).

While it is not possible to distinguish daily (or near daily) cannabis users from those who consume less frequently with CTADS, other data (such as the National Cannabis Survey data) suggest that about 6% of Canadians use cannabis daily (or near daily), compared with about 11% of Canadians who smoke cigarettes daily.

Nearly 8 in 10 (78% or nearly 23.3 million) Canadians aged 15 and older reported having consumed alcohol in the past 12 months, with almost one-quarter (24% or nearly 7.2 million) being considered heavy drinkers. Heavy drinking is defined as having consumed four or more (females) or five or more (males) drinks, per occasion, at least once per month during the previous year.

A further 3% or close to 990,000 Canadians also reported using at least one illegal drug other than cannabis during the previous 12 months.

Other illegal drugs include consumption of at least one of the following substances: cocaine, ecstasy, methamphetamine, hallucinogens, inhalants, heroin or salvia.

A higher percentage of males than females consumed cannabis, tobacco and other illegal drugs. Rates of use tended to be higher among 20- to 24-year-olds compared with those aged 15 to 19 and those aged 25 and older.

Cannabis consumers are more likely than those who do not consume cannabis to drink, smoke cigarettes or use at least one other illegal drug

Cannabis remains the most commonly used drug in Canada, as it is in many other countries. Previous Canadian and international research of adults and youth have found an association between cannabis consumption and an increased likelihood of using other types of substances, including alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

According to CTADS 2017, the proportions of Canadians 15 years of age and older reporting previous 12-month use of alcohol, at least one other illegal drug, or who were current cigarette smokers, were all consistently higher among cannabis users than the rest of the population.



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Alcohol was the substance that was consumed most often among cannabis users (92%) and non-users (76%). The proportion of heavy drinkers was more than three times higher for those who consumed cannabis (56%) than non-cannabis consumers (17%). The proportion of current smokers was also three times higher for those who use cannabis (38%) than non-users (11%).

One-fifth of cannabis consumers (20%) also reported having used another illegal drug in the previous 12 months, compared with less than 1% of non-users.

Table 1

Percentage of people reporting current smoking and alcohol, cannabis and other illegal drugs used in the past 12 months and by cannabis use, household population aged 15 years and older, Canada, 2017

	Total population	Cannabis consumers (past 12 months)	Non-cannabis consumers (past 12 months)
%			
Alcohol			
Total	78.2	92.0	75.9⁴
Sex			
Male ²	79.5	92.1	76.6 ⁴
Female	76.9	91.8	75.2 ⁴
Age group			
15 to 19 years	56.8 ³	92.4	48.3 ⁴
20 to 24 years ²	83.5	97.1	76.7 ⁴
25 years and older	79.4 ³	90.7	77.8 ⁴
Heavy drinker			
Total	24.4	55.8	18.9⁴
Sex			
Male ²	28.1	57.3	21.4 ⁴
Female	20.8 ³	53.3	16.7 ⁴
Age group			
15 to 19 years	19.4 ³	56.2	10.6 ⁴
20 to 24 years ²	40.5	66.7	27.4 ⁴
25 years and older	23.3 ³	53.1	18.9 ⁴
Current cigarette smoker¹			
Total	15.1	38.1	10.7⁴
Sex			
Male ²	16.7	36.3	11.4 ⁴
Female	13.5 ³	41.0	10.0 ⁴
Age group			
15 to 19 years	7.9 ³	28.5	2.7 ⁴
20 to 24 years ²	16.0	32.0	7.8 ⁴
25 years and older	15.6	40.7	11.5 ⁴
Illegal drugs (excluding cannabis)			
Total	3.3	20.1	0.4^{E4}
Sex			
Male ²	5.0	23.8	F
Female	1.8 ^{E3}	14.3 ^E	F
Age group			
15 to 19 years	4.1 ³	18.9	F
20 to 24 years ²	10.3	26.1	2.5 ^{E4}
25 years and older	2.6 ^{E3}	18.8 ^E	F
Cannabis			
Total	14.8
Sex			
Male ²	18.7
Female	11.1 ³
Age group			
15 to 19 years	19.4 ³
20 to 24 years ²	33.2
25 years and older	12.7 ³

... not applicable

E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

1. Current cigarette smoker at the time of the survey.

2. Reference category.

3. Significantly lower than reference category.

4. Significantly lower than cannabis consumers category.

Source(s): Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey ([4440](#)).

One-fifth of cannabis consumers have used other illegal drugs; and most people who have used other illegal drugs reported using cannabis

CTADS 2017 data can also be used to examine the extent of cannabis use among the subset of Canadians who have used other illegal drugs. These data show that nearly 9 in 10 (89%) Canadians who have used other illegal drugs also reported having used cannabis in the past year. By contrast, among cannabis consumers, the majority (80%) have not used other illegal drugs.

Table 2
Percentage of people reporting cannabis use in the past 12 months, by other illegal drug use, household population aged 15 years and older, Canada, 2017

	Total population	Illegal drug users (past 12 months)	Non-users of illegal drugs (past 12 months)
%			
Total	14.8	88.6	12.2³
Sex			
Male ¹	18.7	88.4	14.9 ³
Female	11.1 ²	88.9	9.7 ³
Age group			
15 to 19 years	19.4 ²	88.5	16.4 ³
20 to 24 years ¹	33.2	83.9	27.4 ³
25 years and older	12.7 ²	90.3	10.6 ³

1. Reference category.

2. Significantly lower than reference category.

3. Significantly lower than illegal drug users category.

Source(s): Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey ([4440](#)).

Adolescence is a period of experimentation

According to CTADS, the average age at which Canadians first experimented with a substance varied by substance. While Canadians were 16.4 years of age, on average, the first time they smoked a cigarette, they tended to be older when they started drinking alcohol (18.3 years), trying cannabis (18.6 years—excluding one-time cannabis consumers) or other illegal drugs (19.2 years).

Results show that more than half (54% or close to 11.3 million) of the people who have consumed cannabis more than once did so for the first time before the age of 18. This was higher than those who reported having an alcoholic beverage (48%) or using another type of illegal drug (38%) but lower than the 69% who reported trying smoking (cigarettes) for the first time before the age of 18.

The average age of first use of tobacco and cannabis were similar when examined by sex. However, young men tended to start experimenting with alcohol at a younger age than young women (17.7 years compared with 18.9 years).

The opposite was true with respect to trying other illegal drugs (for the first time) with females reporting use at younger ages than males (18.7 years compared with 19.5 years). At least some of this age difference might be explained by differences between the two sexes in the types of other illegal drugs used and the average age at which they are first tried.

Table 3
**Average age at first use by substance type, household population aged 15 years and older,
Canada, 2017**

	Cigarettes ³	Alcohol ^{2,4}	Cannabis ¹	Illegal drugs ^{2,5} (excluding cannabis)
age (in years)				
Total	16.4	18.3	18.6	19.2
Male	16.3	17.7	18.3	19.5
Female	16.5	18.9	19.1	18.7

1. Excluding one time cannabis consumers.

2. The difference between sexes is significantly different.

3. Significantly lower age than all other substances (alcohol, cannabis and other illegal drugs).

4. Significantly lower age than corresponding illegal drug estimates (total and male only).

5. Significantly higher age than corresponding cannabis estimates for male.

Source(s): Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey ([4440](#)).

Almost two-thirds of Canadian cannabis consumers reported using cannabis for non-medical reasons only

The analysis also reveals the proportion of people who reported using cannabis only for non-medical purposes. In 2017, close to two-thirds of those who used cannabis in the past 12 months (63%) reported having used cannabis exclusively for non-medical purposes, compared with just over one-third (37%) who reported having used cannabis for medical reasons (self-defined or prescribed by a doctor). The proportion of people using cannabis for medical purposes was higher among females (46%) than males (31%).

The three main medical conditions reported by people using cannabis for medical purposes were chronic pain (46%), anxiety and nerves (18%) and insomnia (12%). These findings did not vary by sex.

Use of cannabis for medical purposes was also higher among users aged 25 years and older (42%) than for those under 25 years of age (23%).

Note to readers

The Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CTADS) is a biennial survey of the general population on the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs among Canadians aged 15 years and older. CTADS is a telephone survey conducted by Statistics Canada on behalf of Health Canada.

The overall objective of CTADS is to provide reliable information on tobacco, alcohol and drug use and related issues, with the primary focus on 15- to 24-year-olds.

The target population for the survey is the household population aged 15 years of age and older living in Canada with the following two exceptions: residents of Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut; and full-time residents of institutions.

Data were collected from February to December 2017 inclusively. CTADS response rate was 35.7%, yielding a sample of 16,349 respondents.

For the purposes of this analysis and survey

Users and/or consumers are defined as having used/consumed some form of the substance, regardless of duration, quantity or intensity of use.

Cannabis includes marijuana, hashish, hash oil or any other preparation of the cannabis plant.

There is no distinction between tobacco and cigarettes. Current cigarette smokers include daily and occasional smokers.

For illegal drugs (excluding cannabis) average age was calculated based on the youngest age provided for up to seven different drugs by the number of people reporting using at least one in their lifetime.

Age of first use of each substances was reported and then compared with determined first substance use.

Survey sampling weights were applied to ensure that the analyses are representative of the Canadian population aged 15 and older.

All differences between the characteristics and the comparison groups analyzed are statistically significantly at $p < 0.05$ and were tested using t-test statistics and bootstrap replicate weights to account for the complex sampling design.

Data limitations and cautions

The information is self-reported and has not been validated. Social desirability and fear of punishment, both of which are potential sources of bias, may be especially relevant to this analysis. Changes over time in respondents' willingness to admit drug use may be influencing the statistics but remains difficult to measure.

Additional information

Some indicators, such as the current cigarette smoking rate and alcohol consumption rate, are available at the national and provincial levels from another Statistics Canada survey, the Canadian Community Health Survey.

For various reasons, there are differences between the rates produced by these two surveys. Although this can influence the estimates produced at a single point in time, the trends that emerge from the two surveys are comparable over time. Rather than comparing smoking rates between the two surveys, Statistics Canada recommends choosing a single source, based on users' objectives, and using that source consistently.

For more information regarding cannabis statistics, consult the [Cannabis Stats Hub](#).

Table 4

Number of people reporting current smoking and alcohol, cannabis and other illegal drugs used in the past 12 months and by cannabis use, household population aged 15 years and older, Canada, 2017

	Total population	Cannabis consumers (past 12 months)	Non-cannabis consumers (past 12 months)
thousand			
Alcohol			
Total	23,254.5	4,032.8	19,099.5
Sex			
Male	11,646.2	2,503.3	2,315.0
Female	11,608.3	1,529.6	2,729.0
Age group			
15 to 19 years	1,133.0	355.2	776.3
20 to 24 years	1,954.3	754.0	1,194.3
25 years and older	20,167.2	2,923.6	17,128.8
Heavy drinker			
Total	7,212.8	2,439.8	4,734.9
Sex			
Male	4,102.5	1,552.4	2,513.9
Female	3,110.3	887.4	2,221.0
Age group			
15 to 19 years	386.8	216.0	170.6
20 to 24 years	943.8	517.0	425.3
25 years and older	5,882.2	1,706.8	4,139.1
Current cigarette smoker¹			
Total	4,564.8	1,673.0	2,695.0
Sex			
Male	2,493.8	986.9	1,353.8
Female	2,070.9	686.0	1,341.2
Age group			
15 to 19 years	159.3	110.4	43.4
20 to 24 years	387.0	248.2	121.9
25 years and older	4,018.5	1,314.5	2,529.7
Illegal drugs (excluding cannabis)			
Total	989.1	876.0	113.1
Sex			
Male	720.9	637.6	F
Female	268.2	238.4	F
Age group			
15 to 19 years	82.5	73.0	F
20 to 24 years	241.3	202.3	38.9
25 years and older	665.3	600.6	F
Cannabis			
Total	4,390.8
Sex			
Male	2,719.5
Female	1,671.2
Age group			
15 to 19 years	387.0
20 to 24 years	776.7
25 years and older	3,227.1

... not applicable

F too unreliable to be published

1. Current cigarette smoker at the time of the survey.

Source(s): Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey ([4440](#)).

Table 5

**Number of people reporting cannabis use in the past 12 months, by other illegal drug use,
household population aged 15 years and older, Canada, 2017**

	Total population	Illegal drug users (past 12 months)	Non-users of illegal drugs (past 12 months)
thousand			
Total	4,390.8	875.9	3,477.3
Sex			
Male	2,719.5	637.6	2,045.1
Female	1,671.2	238.4	1,432.2
Age group			
15 to 19 years	387.0	73.0	313.7
20 to 24 years	776.7	202.3	572.3
25 years and older	3,227.1	600.6	2,591.3

Source(s): Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey ([4440](#)).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4440](#).

The 2017 *Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey Microdata File* ([82M0020X](#)) is now available on request.

For more information, or to inquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).

For more information about the tobacco results, contact the Tobacco Office of Research and Surveillance at Health Canada (hc.ctads.questions-ectad.sc@canada.ca).

For more information about the survey and the drug and alcohol results, please write to the Office of Drug Research and Surveillance, Controlled Substances Directorate, Health Canada (hc.odss-bssd.sc@canada.ca).