

Highlights for the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health

The 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) used multimode data collection, in which respondents completed the survey in person or via the web. Estimates based on multimode data collection in 2021 are not comparable with estimates from the 2020 NSDUH or prior years. Therefore, highlights are presented for the 2021 NSDUH only.

Substance Use in the Past Month

- Among people aged 12 or older in 2021, 57.8% (or 161.8 million people) used tobacco, alcohol, or an illicit drug in the past month (also defined as “current use”), including 47.5% (or 133.1 million people) who drank alcohol, 19.5% (or 54.7 million people) who used a tobacco product, and 14.3% (or 40.0 million people) who used an illicit drug.

Tobacco Product Use or Nicotine Vaping

- In 2021, 13.2 million people aged 12 or older (or 4.7%) used an e-cigarette or other vaping device to vape nicotine in the past month. The percentage of people who vaped nicotine was highest among young adults aged 18 to 25 (14.1% or 4.7 million people), followed by adolescents aged 12 to 17 (5.2% or 1.4 million people), then by adults aged 26 or older (3.2% or 7.1 million people).
- Among people aged 12 to 20 in 2021, 11.0% (or 4.3 million people) used tobacco products or used an e-cigarette or other vaping device to vape nicotine in the past month. Among people in this age group, 8.1% (or 3.1 million people) vaped nicotine, 5.4% (or 2.1 million people) used tobacco products, and 3.4% (or 1.3 million people) smoked cigarettes in the past month.

Alcohol Use

- Among the 133.1 million current alcohol users aged 12 or older in 2021, 60.0 million people (or 45.1%) were past month binge drinkers. The percentage of people who were past month binge drinkers was highest among young adults aged 18 to 25 (29.2% or 9.8 million people), followed by adults aged 26 or older (22.4% or 49.3 million people), then by adolescents aged 12 to 17 (3.8% or 995,000 people).
- Among people aged 12 to 20 in 2021, 15.1% (or 5.9 million people) were past month alcohol users. Estimates of binge alcohol use and heavy alcohol use in the past month among underage people were 8.3% (or 3.2 million people) and 1.6% (or 613,000 people), respectively.

Any Vaping

- Among people aged 12 or older who vaped any substance in the past month, 71.1% vaped nicotine, 40.1% vaped marijuana, and 19.2% vaped flavoring.

Illicit Drug Use

- In 2021, marijuana was the most commonly used illicit drug, with 18.7% of people aged 12 or older (or 52.5 million people) using it in the past year. The percentage was highest among young adults aged 18 to 25 (35.4% or 11.8 million people), followed by adults aged 26 or older (17.2% or 37.9 million people), then by adolescents aged 12 to 17 (10.5% or 2.7 million people).

- Among people aged 12 or older in 2021, 3.3% (or 9.2 million people) misused opioids (heroin or prescription pain relievers) in the past year. Among the 9.2 million people who misused opioids in the past year, 8.7 million people misused prescription pain relievers compared with 1.1 million people who used heroin. These numbers include 574,000 people who both misused prescription pain relievers and used heroin in the past year.

Substance Use Disorder

- In the 2021 NSDUH, the presence of a substance use disorder (SUD) in the past year was assessed based on criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition (DSM-5). Respondents were asked SUD questions for any alcohol or drugs they used in the 12 months prior to the survey. Drugs included marijuana, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, methamphetamine, and any use of prescription stimulants, tranquilizers or sedatives (e.g., benzodiazepines), and pain relievers. Thus, the DSM-5 SUD criteria in 2021 for prescription drugs applied to people who used but did not misuse prescription drugs in the past year, in addition to people who misused them.
- In 2021, the percentage of people aged 12 or older with an SUD was highest among young adults aged 18 to 25 (25.6% or 8.6 million people), followed by adults aged 26 or older (16.1% or 35.5 million people), then by adolescents aged 12 to 17 (8.5% or 2.2 million people).

Mental Health among Youth

- Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021, 20.1% (or 5.0 million people) had a past year major depressive episode (MDE), and 14.7% (or 3.7 million people) had a past year MDE with severe impairment.
- Adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021 with a past year MDE were more likely than those without a past year MDE to have used most illicit drugs in the past year. For example, 27.7% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 with a past year MDE used illicit drugs in the past year compared with 10.7% of those without a past year MDE.

Mental Health among Adults

- Among adults aged 18 or older in 2021, 22.8% (or 57.8 million people) had any mental illness (AMI) in the past year. The percentage of adults aged 18 or older with AMI in the past year was highest among young adults aged 18 to 25 (33.7% or 11.3 million people), followed by adults aged 26 to 49 (28.1% or 28.8 million people), then by adults aged 50 or older (15.0% or 17.7 million people).
- In 2021, 5.5% of adults aged 18 or older (or 14.1 million people) had serious mental illness (SMI) in the past year. The percentage of adults aged 18 or older with SMI was highest among young adults aged 18 to 25 (11.4% or 3.8 million people), followed by adults aged 26 to 49 (7.1% or 7.3 million people), then by adults aged 50 or older (2.5% or 3.0 million people).

- Nearly half of young adults aged 18 to 25 in 2021 (45.8% or 15.3 million people) had either an SUD or AMI in the past year. This percentage was higher than corresponding percentages among adults aged 26 to 49 (39.5% or 40.4 million people) and adults aged 50 or older (22.6% or 26.7 million people).
- Among adults aged 18 or older in 2021, those with SMI or AMI in the past year were more likely than those with no mental illness in the past year to be past year users of illicit drugs overall. An estimated 50.2% of adults aged 18 or older with SMI and 39.7% of adults aged 18 or older with AMI used illicit drugs in the past year compared with 17.7% of adults aged 18 or older with no mental illness.

Suicidal Thoughts and Behavior

- Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021, 12.7% (or 3.3 million people) had serious thoughts of suicide, 5.9% (or 1.5 million people) made a suicide plan, and 3.4% (or 892,000 people) attempted suicide in the past year.
- Among adults aged 18 or older in 2021, 4.8% (or 12.3 million people) had serious thoughts of suicide, 1.4% (or 3.5 million people) made a suicide plan, and 0.7% (or 1.7 million people) attempted suicide in the past year.

Substance Use Treatment

- People were classified as needing substance use treatment if they had an *illicit* drug or alcohol use disorder in the past year or if they received substance use treatment at a specialty facility in the past year. Among people aged 12 or older in 2021, 15.6% (or 43.7 million people) needed substance use treatment in the past year.
- Among the 40.7 million people aged 12 or older in 2021 with an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder in the past year who did not receive treatment at a specialty facility, 96.8% (or 39.5 million people) did not feel that they needed treatment, 2.1% (or 837,000 people) felt that they needed treatment but did not make an effort to get treatment, and 1.1% (or 447,000 people) felt that they needed treatment and made an effort to get treatment.

Mental Health Service Use

- Among the 5.0 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021 who had a past year MDE, 40.6% (or 2.0 million people) received treatment for depression in the past year.
- Among the 21.0 million adults aged 18 or older in 2021 who had a past year MDE, 61.0% (or 12.6 million people) received treatment for depression in the past year.
- Among the 57.8 million adults aged 18 or older in 2021 with AMI in the past year, 47.2% (or 26.5 million people) received any of the following mental health services in the past year: inpatient or outpatient mental health services, prescription medication for a mental health issue, or virtual (i.e., telehealth) services. Among the 14.1 million adults aged 18 or older in 2021 with SMI in the past year, 65.4% (or 9.1 million people) received any of these mental health services in the past year.

- Among the 14.1 million adults aged 18 or older in 2021 with SMI in the past year, 51.5% (or 7.2 million people) perceived an unmet need for mental health services in the past year.

Service Use among People with Co-Occurring Mental Health Issues and Illicit Drug or Alcohol Use Disorder

- Among the 842,000 adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021 with a co-occurring MDE and an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder in the past year, 56.1% (or 471,000 people) received either substance use treatment at a specialty facility or mental health services in the past year. Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 with a co-occurring MDE and an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder in the past year who received either service, most (93.5%) received only mental health services.
- Among the 17.9 million adults aged 18 or older in 2021 with co-occurring AMI and an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder in the past year, 52.5% (or 9.0 million people) received either substance use treatment at a specialty facility or mental health services in the past year. Among adults aged 18 or older with co-occurring AMI and an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder who received either service in the past year, most (84.0%) received only mental health services.
- Among the 5.8 million adults aged 18 or older in 2021 with co-occurring SMI and an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder in the past year, 66.9% (or 3.9 million people) received either substance use treatment at a specialty facility or mental health services in the past year. Among adults aged 18 or older with co-occurring SMI and an illicit drug or alcohol use disorder who received either service in the past year, most (81.5%) received only mental health services.

Perceived Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Nearly half of adolescents aged 12 to 17 with a past year MDE (45.1% or 2.2 million people) perceived that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic negatively affected their mental health “quite a bit or a lot.” In comparison, 12.4% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 without a past year MDE (or 2.4 million people) perceived this level of a negative effect on their mental health because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Similarly, nearly half of adults aged 18 or older with SMI in the past year (48.9% or 6.8 million people) perceived a negative impact of COVID-19 on their mental health.