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## Annual Indiana youth survey: Students asked about synthetic marijuana, prescription drugs



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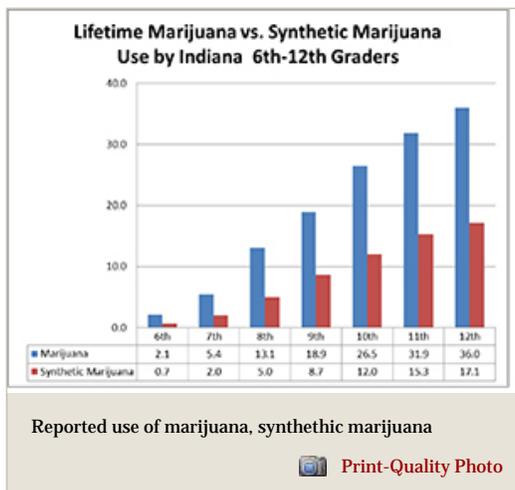
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Sept. 4, 2013**

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Findings from the 23rd Annual Survey of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Use revealed that marijuana use in Grades 6 to 12 continues to decrease. This reduction followed a peak in marijuana use from 2008 to 2011. While marijuana use is down, it remains more popular than synthetic marijuana.

"Synthetic marijuana is a relatively new drug that is being sold at stores as herbal incense," said Ruth Gassman, director of the **Indiana Prevention Resource Center** at **Indiana University's School of Public Health-Bloomington**. The center conducted the survey. "The survey results suggest that synthetic marijuana is being used in conjunction with marijuana for youth across grade levels. This indicates that synthetic marijuana is not substituting marijuana, but is being used as an additional drug."

**Synthetic marijuana use**



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Synthetic marijuana refers to a wide variety of herbal mixtures -- dried, shredded plant material sprayed with chemical additives that when smoked are responsible for their mind-altering effects. Often marketed as "safe" and "legal" alternatives to marijuana and sold as incense, this wide variety of products has many names, including "Spice" and "K2."

"Synthetic marijuana affects the central nervous system, causing altered perceptions, hallucinations, paranoia, elevated blood pressure and sometimes seizures," Gassman said. "One of the unique dangers of synthetic marijuana is that the chemicals used in making it are often unknown and can lead to powerful and unpredictable effects on the user."

Synthetic marijuana smells like incense when burning and comes in a variety of scents. Parents need to look for dried leaves, rolling papers, drug paraphernalia such as pipes and screens and unusual packages in the mail. Synthetic marijuana is available online and in certain stores.



Ruth Gassman

 [Print-Quality Photo](#)

Indiana banned the sale of synthetic marijuana in July 2011; in 2012, the state added more than 60 chemical compounds found in synthetic drugs to its list of illegal substances. Synthetic marijuana is a Schedule I drug, meaning it has no accepted medical use, unpredictable effects and a high potential for abuse. The manufacturers of synthetic marijuana are constantly changing the chemical content, making it difficult to enforce laws banning the products.

Because questions about synthetic marijuana are new to the survey this year, it is not possible to compare rates of use with previous years.

### **Prescription drug use -- new questions**

Reducing prescription drug use without a physician's prescription is a national priority. In addition to asking students about synthetic marijuana use, this year's survey asked questions about risk factors for prescription drug use.

Risk factors refer to aspects of the individual's neighborhood, school, family and peer relationships that place people at increased risk for problem behaviors; protective factors are conditions that help eliminate such risk. An example of a risk factor at the family level is the family's history and pattern of drug use and certain attitudes toward drugs, while a protective factor is good communication in general and specifically about substance use. Studies show that if youths believe that the consequences of using drugs cause harm, use goes down.

Perception plays a key role as well. Youths who perceive that their friends and peers disapprove of drug use are less likely to use. Adolescents' perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward drug use are another factor that has a large impact on the rate of drug use among youths.

Here are some of the survey findings:

- The rate of students reporting use of prescription drugs that were not prescribed to them ranged from a low of 1.9 percent for sixth-graders to a high of 14.3 percent for 12th-graders.
- The rate of students who reported buying prescription drugs from friends ranged from 0.2 percent for sixth-graders to 2.3 percent for 12th-graders.
- The rate of students who reported getting prescription drugs from family members ranged from 0.2 percent for sixth-graders to 0.5 percent of 10th-graders and 12th-graders.

"The risk and protective factors that are used in our survey are predictive of a variety of harmful behaviors besides substance use, such as delinquency, violence and school dropout," Gassman said. "Both risk and protective factors are key concepts in public health; they are measured to assess what prevention programs should be used in a given school or community. Indiana Survey data is important to inform decisions that target policies, programs and practices to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors."

The Indiana Prevention Resource Center works to lower rates of prescription drug use among youth in Indiana through the following:

- Indiana's Partnership's for Success Initiative, a Substance Abuse and

Mental Health Services Administration grant focused on increasing youth perceptions of risk, and monitoring of prescription drug dispensing by pharmacists and physicians. The IPRC's role is in providing communities with critical resources such as training, technical assistance, evaluation and assessment; and in data, capacity building, strategic planning and selection of appropriate prevention programs to reduce prescription drug misuse among people age 12 to 25.

- The IPRC's Keep Rx Safe website and Public Service Announcement Video Contest (now in its fifth year) both address the problem of prescription drug misuse among youths in Indiana through information, data and educational resources related to prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse.

### **Decrease in gambling**

The **Indiana Problem Gambling Awareness Program** -- housed within the IPRC and funded by a contract with the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Mental Health and Addiction, with funds through the Indiana Problem Gamblers' Assistance Fund -- provides information and technical assistance to Indiana organizations seeking to prevent problem gambling by children, adolescents and young adults.

As gambling options and venues such as riverboats and racinos in the state expand, monitoring the prevalence of gambling activities among youth is increasingly important for planning prevention efforts. The Indiana Survey included questions about the following forms of gambling: playing cards, betting on games, betting on sports, buying lottery tickets, gambling in a casino and playing online for money.

The legal gambling age in Indiana varies depending on the type of gambling. Lottery, scratch cards and bingo are legal at 18. Land-based casino and slot machine games are legal at 21. This year the survey revealed a significant decrease in all forms of gambling across Grades 6 through 12.

"Prevention programs and increased problem gambling awareness are having a positive effect in Indiana," said Mary Lay, project manager and research associate with the Indiana Problem Gambling Awareness Program. "We are seeing a reduction in gambling behaviors across all grades and an increase in remorse associated with gambling behaviors. It is important to remember that since gambling is illegal for almost all students surveyed, any level of gambling is a problem for our youth, and we need to be diligent in our efforts to combat this addiction."

### **About the survey**

The survey, coordinated by the Indiana Prevention Resource Center and funded by the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration's Division of Mental Health and Addiction, was administered to 117,554 students in public and private schools.

The Indiana Prevention Resource Center provides substance abuse and gambling prevention, treatment and recovery resources for those working with youth in schools and communities throughout Indiana.

The [full survey report is available online](#).

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### **About the School of Public Health-Bloomington**

With nearly 3,000 students in an array of undergraduate and advanced degree programs, the School of Public Health-Bloomington offers a traditional campus experience enriched by 21st-century innovation. More than 120 faculty in five academic departments -- Department of Kinesiology; Department of Applied Health Science; Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Studies; Department of Environmental Health; and Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics -- conduct major research, teach and engage with communities across a broad spectrum of health, wellness and disease-prevention topics. Each department offers numerous majors, minors and opportunities for graduate and undergraduate studies. In addition to its academic departments, the school administers Campus Recreational Sports, which serves roughly 80 percent of the IU Bloomington student body through various intramural, club and individual sports opportunities.