The Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey (RACYS) is a data source for behavioral health and substance use attitudes and behaviors among Colorado youth ages 12–17. The 2018 data of more than 600 youth is based on a representative sample of the entire state. For more information and complete survey data, visit www.riseaboveco.org.

**SUBSTANCE USE – COLORADO YOUTH 2018**

Surveyed youth were asked, “During your life, how many times have you used (substance)?”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>2018 %</th>
<th>Statistically Significant Decrease since 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol*</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meth</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rx Pain Relievers</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PERCEIVED RISK**

- Youth’s perceived risk in alcohol and marijuana use is decreasing
- Youth’s perceived risk in prescription drug use is increasing

**ACCESS**

Ease of access, curiosity to try and direct offers are all increasing around ages 14–15 when many youth transition from middle to high school.

**SOCIAL NORMS: PERCEPTION VS. REALITY 2016 – 2018**

Overestimation of schoolmates’ substance use has decreased amongst Middle School Aged Youth (12–14):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% of Youth Overestimation Per Substance</th>
<th>% of Youth Overestimation Per Substance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 – 14</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 17</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – 14</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 17</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – 14</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 17</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCES**

Youth reporting 6 or more difficult mental health days in a month are significantly more likely to have tried alcohol, marijuana and prescription pain relievers than those who have no difficult mental health days:

- 1 in 4 Youth said they had 6 or more difficult mental health days in the last month.
- 6 or more difficult mental health days in a month are significantly more likely to have tried alcohol, marijuana and prescription pain relievers.

**Denotes Statistically Significant Difference**

*QUESTION WORDING CHANGED SLIGHTLY IN 2018 TO DEFINE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AS "AT LEAST ONE DRINK RATHER THAN JUST A FEW SIPS."*
Emerging Issue: Youth Vaping

WHAT WE KNOW

What Is Vaping?
Vaping is the act of inhaling and exhaling an aerosol made up of fine particles, also known as vapor. This vapor is produced by a battery operated device known as an e-cigarette.

Surveyed youth were asked, “What do you use in your vape pen?”

In the 2018 Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey, participants were asked for the first time if they smoke, including using a vape pen or some other form of e-cigarette, due to growing concern about this behavior among youth:

The vast majority of youth (92%) said they don’t smoke, use a vape pen, or other form of e-cigarette.

Those Youth Who Smoke Or Vape

Are more than 2X as likely to use
Are nearly 5X as likely to use
Are 10X as likely to misuse

Are at least 2x as likely to have been offered alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs

Are more curious to use substances like marijuana and prescription drugs

Half (50%) have used more than 10 days a month, including 1 in 5 who use every day

WHAT WE CAN LEARN

What Are Youth Vaping?

Out of the youth who vape, 78% reported using nicotine-free flavoring in their vape pens.

Surveyed youth were asked, “What do you use in your vape pen?”

Did You Know?

• Although many youth who vape report they are using nicotine-free products, almost all vape products sold in convenience stores—including all JUUL products—DO CONTAIN NICOTINE, even if the label doesn’t say so.1

• The “vapor” of an e-cigarette is often mistaken for water mist, but is in fact an aerosol containing minute particles.2

• Diacetyl, a chemical sometimes found in vaping liquids, is linked to “Popcorn Lung,” a serious lung disease.3

• Colorado youth lead the nation in use of vape/e-cigarette products. To learn more, visit www.iriseaboveco.org.

2“What is Vaping?,” Center on Addiction, 2018.
Prescription Drugs: Pain Relievers and Stimulants

MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION PAIN RELIEVERS AND PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS

**PRESCRIPTION PAIN RELIEVERS:**
- **LIFETIME MISUSE**
  - STILL LOW AT 4%
  - YET HAS DOUBLED SINCE 2013
  - 2013: 2%, 2016: 3%, 2018: 4%

**PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS:**
- **LIFETIME MISUSE**
  - STILL LOW AT 4%
  - AND STABLE SINCE 2013
  - 2013: 3%, 2016: 4%, 2018: 4%

PERCEIVED RISK

Among surveyed youth, the perception of risk in misusing prescription pain relievers or stimulants jumped from 2016 to 2018.

**LIMITED MISUSE**
- (USING ONCE OR TWICE)

**PERCEPTION OF GREAT RISK**

- **Prescription Pain Relievers:**
  - 2016: 48%, 2018: 65%

- **Prescription Stimulants:**
  - 2016: 36%, 2018: 54%

EASE OF ACCESS

Of concern, access to prescription drugs has gotten easier since 2016, growing from 38% to 44% of youth reporting they would be somewhat or very easy to access.

- **“How Difficult, Or Easy, Do You Think It Would Be For YOU To Get Prescription Drugs?”**
  - 2016: 38%, 2018: 44%
  - Very & Somewhat Easy: 15%, Very Easy: 19%

FEWER YOUTH IN 2018 THINK PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ARE NOT ADDICTIVE OR SAFER THAN ILLEGAL DRUGS

- **“Prescription Drugs Are Not Addictive”**
  - 2016: 24%, 2018: 13%

- **“Prescription Pain Relievers Are Not Addictive”**
  - 2016: 7%, 2018: 3%

- **“Prescription Drugs Are Safer Than Illegal Drugs”**
  - 2016: 20%, 2018: 11%

- **“Prescription Pain Relievers Are Safer Than Illegal Drugs”**
  - 2016: 8%, 2018: 4%

*MISUSE: Taking prescription drugs such as pain relievers (such as Vicodin or Oxycontin) or stimulants (such as Adderall, Ritalin) for the purpose of getting high or staying awake.

Denotes Statistically Significant Difference

SURVEY DATA FROM 2018 RACY'S RESULTS
FAMILY DISCUSSIONS

Family discussions about prescription drugs have increased substantially from 32% in 2013 to 51% in 2018, though still well below the percent reported for family discussions about alcohol and marijuana.

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The following factors have strong influence on an individual’s misuse and curiosity to misuse prescription drugs:

- Using prescription drugs like Ritalin or Adderal is safe, even if the prescription isn’t written for you.
- Drugs can help teens manage the stress and pressure we have to deal with.
- Experimenting with drugs is just part of being a teenager—it’s not that big of a deal.
- My parents would be fine with me drinking beer once in a while.
- The schoolwork I am assigned is often meaningful and important to me.
Alcohol and Marijuana

Marijuana was legalized for those aged 21+ in Colorado in 2014.

**LIFETIME ALCOHOL USE**

- 2013: 33%
- 2018: 37%

Reported use between 2013–2018 stayed stable.

**LIFETIME MARIJUANA USE**

- 2013: 16%
- 2018: 17%

Reported use from 2013–2018 stayed stable without significant change.

**PERCEIVED RISK: ALCOHOL**

- From 2013–2018, perception of ‘great risk’ in regular alcohol use has gone down significantly.
  - 2013: 73%
  - 2018: 67%

**PERCEIVED RISK: MARIJUANA**

- From 2013–2018, perception of ‘great risk’ in regular marijuana use has gone down significantly.
  - 2013: 71%
  - 2018: 60%

**SOCIAL NORMS: PERCEPTION VS. REALITY**

While marijuana’s actual use stayed stable,

- Overestimation of schoolmates’ 30-day marijuana use increased among high school aged youth (15–17) from 2016–2018.
  - 2016: 87%
  - 2018: 92%
**ALCOHOL & MARIJUANA: AGE OF FIRST USE**

Majority of those surveyed who've tried alcohol and marijuana, did so before the age of 15. Prevention programming must begin early and be sustained into high school, creating opportunities for peer education and leadership.

![Chart showing age of first use for alcohol and marijuana](chart.png)

**EASE OF ACCESS**

Those youth reporting that it is ‘Very’ or ‘Somewhat Easy’ to access alcohol stayed relatively the same between 2013 to 2018, but those reporting it was easy to access marijuana increased in that same time period.

![EASE OF ACCESS](chart.png)

**RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

The following factors have strong influence on an individual's use and curiosity to use alcohol and marijuana:

- **Using prescription drugs like Ritalin or Adderall is safe, even if the prescription isn't written for you.**
- **My parents would be fine with me drinking beer or smoking marijuana once in a while.**
- **Drugs can help teens manage the stress and pressure we have to deal with.**
- **The schoolwork I am assigned is often meaningful and important to me.**
- **Experimenting with drugs is just part of being a teenager—it's not that big of a deal.**
- **I am confident that if I experiment with drugs, I could stop whenever I wanted to.**

![Risk and Protective Factors](chart.png)
LIFETIME AND RECENT USE

REPORTED USE HAS STAYED VERY LOW AT 2% BETWEEN 2009–2018

THOUGH USE IS LOW, 7% of youth reported having received a direct offer of Meth.

PERCEIVED RISK

FROM 2013–2018, PERCEPTION OF ‘GREAT RISK’ IN REGULAR METH USE HAS STAYED HIGH

FROM 2013–2018, PERCEPTION OF ‘GREAT RISK’ IN LIMITED METH USE DECREASED SIGNIFICANTLY, BY 6 POINTS

EASE OF ACCESS

Access to Meth has gotten easier since 2013, growing from 9% to 17% of youth reporting it would be somewhat or very easy to access.

Though Meth access is getting easier, it’s still one of the most difficult substances to access. Only heroin remains more difficult with regards to access.

“How Difficult, Or Easy, Do You Think It Would Be For YOU To Get Meth?”

2013 2018

9% 17% 

3% 6% 

Very Easy Very & Somewhat Easy

% Very & Somewhat Easy to Access Substance

2018

12% 17% 44% 57% 60%
Middle school aged youth are getting better at recognizing the reality of their peers’ use of Meth. The move is in the right direction and we can continue to normalize the fact that the vast majority of youth have never used Meth.

**SOCIAL NORMS: PERCEPTION VS. REALITY**

Meth use has stayed low, and **OVERESTIMATION OF SCHOOLMATES’ 30-DAY METH USE DECREASED AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL AGED YOUTH (12 – 14) FROM 2016 TO 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

The following factors have **strong influence on an individual’s use and curiosity to use Meth:**

- **Risk Factor**
  - Experimenting with drugs is just part of being a teenager—it’s not that big of a deal.

- **Protective Factor**
  - The schoolwork I am assigned is often meaningful and important to me.
WHAT IS SOCIAL NORMING?

Social norming seeks to close the gaps between youth perceptions of their peers’ substance use and actual self-reported use data, an approach that has been proven to lead to reduced use over time.1

SUBSTANCE USE: PERCEPTION VS. REALITY 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle School Aged Youth (12–14)</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>High School Aged Youth (15–17)</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALCOHOL</td>
<td>Perceived Peer Use at School Perceived Peer Use in Grade Self-Reported 30-Day Use</td>
<td><img src="9%25_image" alt="9%" /> <img src="12%25_image" alt="12%" /> <img src="5%25_image" alt="5%" /> 95%</td>
<td>ALCOHOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARIJUANA</td>
<td>Perceived Peer Use at School Perceived Peer Use in Grade Self-Reported 30-Day Use</td>
<td><img src="21%25_image" alt="21%" /> <img src="17%25_image" alt="17%" /> <img src="3%25_image" alt="3%" /> 97%</td>
<td>MARIJUANA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESCRIPTION PAIN RELIEVERS</td>
<td>Perceived Peer Use at School Perceived Peer Use in Grade Self-Reported 30-Day Use</td>
<td><img src="9%25_image" alt="9%" /> <img src="6%25_image" alt="6%" /> <img src="1%25_image" alt="1%" /> 99%</td>
<td>PRESCRIPTION PAIN RELIEVERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS</td>
<td>Perceived Peer Use at School Perceived Peer Use in Grade Self-Reported 30-Day Use</td>
<td><img src="7%25_image" alt="7%" /> <img src="5%25_image" alt="5%" /> <img src="1%25_image" alt="1%" /> 99%</td>
<td>PRESCRIPTION STIMULANTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METH</td>
<td>Perceived Peer Use at School Perceived Peer Use in Grade Self-Reported 30-Day Use</td>
<td><img src="9%25_image" alt="9%" /> <img src="5%25_image" alt="5%" /> <img src="1%25_image" alt="1%" /> 99%</td>
<td>METH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Misperceptions increase over time, and misperceptions grow the further they extend from an individual’s immediate surroundings (grade/school).

REPRESENTATION OF ACTUAL USE

Colorado’s total population of high school aged youth (15–17) is the equivalent of 11 Pepsi Centers filled to capacity:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

14% ≈ 28,000

9% ≈ 18,000

1% ≈ 2,000


Denotes Statistically Significant Difference
While inaccurate perceptions of marijuana use remains prevalent among high school aged youth, overestimation of schoolmates’ use of alcohol, prescription drugs and meth decreased significantly since 2016 among middle school aged youth (12 to 14):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Age 12 – 14</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 15 – 17</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>Age 12 – 14</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 15 – 17</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Pain Relievers</td>
<td>Age 12 – 14</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 15 – 17</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Stimulants</td>
<td>Age 12 – 14</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 15 – 17</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meth</td>
<td>Age 12 – 14</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 15 – 17</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCERN: THE CONSEQUENCES OF MISPERCEPTIONS

Of those who overestimated their peers’ substance use:

- More than 1 in 5 have used marijuana, 30% higher than the overall rate of use.
- More than 2 in 5 have been offered alcohol and marijuana, 20% higher than the overall rate of offers.
- Nearly half have used alcohol, 30% higher than the overall rate of use.

HOPE: HOW ARE COLORADO YOUTH RISING ABOVE?

Most Colorado youth are making healthy choices every day and there are many opportunities to enhance our support of their growth and development. The behaviors below are known protective factors and by increasing their prevalence we can help reduce youth substance use.

- 65% Report they are capable of standing up for their beliefs.
- 62% Report knowing an adult they can talk to.
- 85% Participate in at least one extracurricular activity.
- 66% Have goals they have set for themselves.