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Substance Use

Among Colorado's Youth

The Issue

Use of alcohol or other drugs impairs judgment, a skill that adolescents are still developing. Substance abuse is associated with mood changes, memory loss and brain damage, thus increasing the chances of a variety of education-related issues, including poor school performance, truancy, academic failure, dropping out of school and limited expectations for higher education. In addition, the earlier adolescents begin to use illegal drugs and/or abuse otherwise legal substances, the more likely they are to continue using substances and to engage in other risky behaviors.¹

Facts about Youth Substance Use in Colorado

Source: 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

- **27%** had their first drink of alcohol (other than a few sips) before the age of 13.
- **47%** drank alcohol during the past month.
- **31%** consumed five or more alcoholic beverages in a row on one or more days during the past month.
- **10%** tried marijuana for the first time before the age of 13.
- **42%** have used marijuana one or more times in their lifetime.
- **23%** used marijuana during the past month.
- **8%** ever used cocaine.
- **10%** ever used inhalants.
- **21%** were offered, sold or given an illegal drug on school property during the past year.

Substance Use and Coordinated School Health

Comprehensive health education, school-based health services, counseling and mental health services, healthy school environment, and parental and community involvement all work together to address substance use and prevention and improve educational outcomes. Such programs have been proven to improve test performance, attendance and school connectedness.

Schools offering these services report:

- Increased school attendance
- Decreased drop-outs and suspensions
- Higher graduation rates

For more information on the link between health and learning, see the Summary of Selected Evidence-Based Research from "Healthy Kids Learn Better" and "Making the Connection: Health and Student Achievement" at www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/results.htm.

What You Can Do

Use state, local and national youth risk behavior data to make a case for:

- creating a school health team in every school building
- coordinating messages, activities, programs and funding for healthy students and safe schools.
- enforcing tobacco-free and drug-free school policies

Resources

For complete Colorado YRBS data, visit www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/index.htm. For national YRBS data, visit www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/SS/SS5505.pdf.

1. www.colorado.gov/bestpractices/druguseprevention/index.html