



Voices of Child Health in Chicago REPORT

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Overall, adults in Chicago were most concerned about youth drug use related to prescription drugs including narcotic painkillers, such as opioids.

Concerns about specific drugs differed by respondent race and ethnicity. Latinx respondents were most concerned about cocaine, Non-Latinx Black respondents were most concerned about marijuana, and Non-Latinx White respondents were most concerned about prescription drugs.

Younger adults were more concerned about prescription drugs than older adults.

 Ann & Robert H. Lurie
Children's Hospital of Chicago

Stanley Manne
Children's Research Institute™

Smith Child Health Research,
Outreach and Advocacy Center

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Chicago Adults' Concerns about Youth Drug Use

Drug use among youth continues to be a top concern among parents and adults in Chicago.^{1,2} In this report, we explore public concerns about youth drug use in more depth. Researchers at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago teamed up with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) on the 2018–19 Healthy Chicago Survey, Jr. We asked adults whether they considered drug use a “big problem” facing Chicago youth, and if so, what particular drug they were most concerned about. We also asked adults some questions about themselves and their families. To learn more about drug use among youth, visit luriechildrens.org/YouthDrugUse.

Who considered drug use a “big problem” for Chicago youth?

Overall, 61% of Chicago adults considered drug use a “big problem” facing youth. We also explored how people from various groups felt about drug use among youth. People living in poverty (below the federal poverty level [FPL], which in 2019 is \$25,750 for a family of four³) or with near-poor or middle income (100–399% of the FPL) were more likely to consider drug use a big problem (70% and 63%, respectively) than people with higher household income (400% or above the FPL) (55%). Additionally, Latinx respondents were most likely to consider drug use a big problem (71%), followed by Non-Latinx Black (64%) and Non-Latinx White (53%). Concern about youth drug use did not vary by a person's age, whether they were a parent or not, or the age(s) of their child(ren).

What drugs were Chicago adults most concerned about, regarding youth drug use?

When a person said they considered drug use a big problem for youth, we asked them what drug they were most concerned about. Respondents then selected one drug from four different options: cocaine, heroin, marijuana and prescription drugs (including narcotic painkillers). Alcohol and tobacco products (e.g., cigarettes, e-cigarettes) were not included as drug categories. Overall, the drug that people were most concerned about was prescription drugs (35%), followed by marijuana (29%), heroin (22%) and cocaine (15%) (Figure 1).

Other research supports the high level of concern about prescription drugs such as opioids. Researchers examining mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that between 1999 and 2016, 8,986 children and adolescents died from prescription and illicit (i.e., heroin) opioid poisonings in the United States. This represented a 268% increase in the pediatric mortality rate for opioid poisonings during that time period.⁴ Recent research has shown that nonmedical prescription opioid use among adolescents is associated with future heroin use.⁵

Data from the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) of Chicago public high school students showed that Chicago students had similar usage levels to national levels for prescription pain drugs and cocaine. However, Chicago high school students were more likely than other students in the U.S. to have used heroin (5% vs. 2%) and marijuana (44% vs. 36%).⁶

Adolescent use of marijuana has been associated with long-term negative effects on inhibitory control and memory, and these effects are more pronounced than those observed for alcohol consumption.⁷ As of January 1, 2020, recreational marijuana (use, purchase and possession of) will be legal for

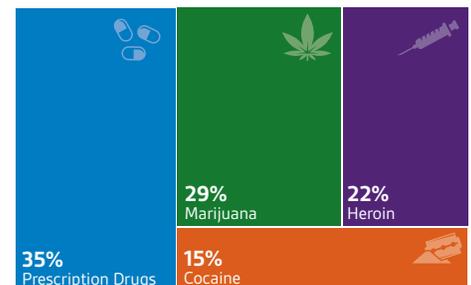


Figure 1. Proportion of adult respondents who were most concerned about each drug type, among those who considered drug use a “big problem” for Chicago youth; *Note: Percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding.*

anyone over the age of 21 in the State of Illinois.⁸ Research on how recreational marijuana legalization affects youth marijuana usage has had mixed results, with some research indicating that legalization was associated with higher rates of use among youth in some states (e.g., Washington) and other research indicating that youth marijuana use did not change after legalization (e.g., Colorado).^{9,10}

Local and national helplines are available for individuals who may have a substance use disorder: in Chicago (1.833.2.FIND.HELP) and across the U.S. (1.800.662.HELP).

Concerns about Specific Drugs by Household Income and Age

We also examined concerns about specific drug types among people from different groups. For instance, adults with higher household income were more likely to be concerned about prescription drugs (46%) than other adults living with lower household income or in poverty (29–32%). In contrast, adults living in poverty or with near-poor or middle household income were more likely to be concerned about cocaine (14–19%) than people with higher household income (9%).

Additionally, younger adults (18–29 years old and 30–44 years old) were more likely to be concerned about prescription drugs (both 40%) than older people (45+ years old, 27%). Older adults were more likely to be concerned about heroin (27%) than younger people (18–19%) (Figure 2a).

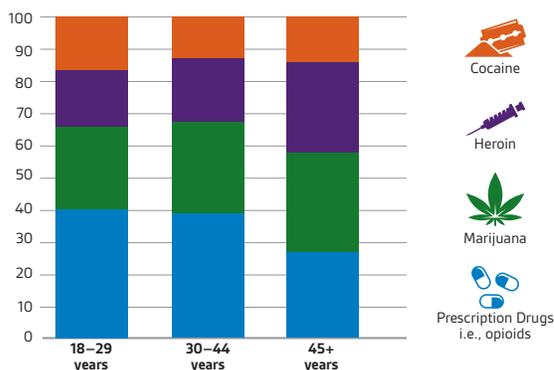


Figure 2a. Proportions of respondents who were most concerned about each drug type, by respondent age

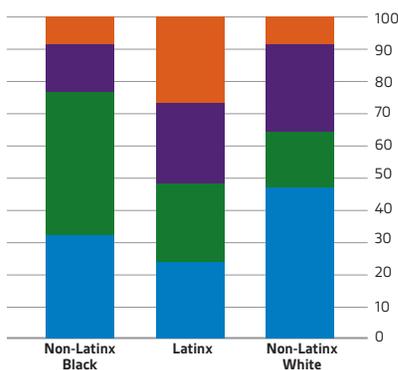


Figure 2b. Proportions of respondents who were most concerned about each drug type, by respondent race and ethnicity

Concerns about Specific Drugs by Respondent Race

The drug that people were most concerned about differed by respondent race and ethnicity. Latinx respondents were most concerned about cocaine (26%), although Latinx respondents were nearly equally concerned about all the drug types. Non-Latinx Black respondents were most concerned about marijuana (45%). Non-Latinx White respondents were most concerned about prescription drugs (47%) (see Figure 2b).

Data from the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicated that, among Chicago public high school students, 44% had used marijuana, 15% had used prescription pain medicine without a doctor's prescription or differently than how a doctor told them to use it, 7% had used cocaine and 5% had used heroin. These use rates did not differ by student race or ethnicity, except for marijuana — with Non-Latinx Black students (48%) and Latinx students (45%) slightly more likely to have used marijuana than Non-Latinx White students (37%).⁶

Lurie Children's has an outpatient [Substance Use & Prevention Program](#). To learn more or request an appointment call 1-800-KIDS DOC (1-800-543-7362).

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HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

This report presents findings from the 2018–19 Healthy Chicago Survey, Jr., administered by the Chicago Department of Public Health in collaboration with Lurie Children's. The survey was administered via phone interviews from December 2018 through May 2019. The sample consisted of 2,982 adults in Chicago, 740 of whom were the parent, step-parent or guardian (referred to as "parents" in this report) of at least one child under 18 years old living in the household. The survey cooperation rate was 12%. All analyses were conducted with statistical weighting so that they are representative of the adult population of the City of Chicago during the time period of data collection. For more information about health in your community, visit chicagohealthatlas.org.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Nikhil G. Prachand, MPH
Director of Epidemiology
Kingsley N. Weaver, MPH
Senior Epidemiologist
Emily M. Laflamme, MPH
Senior Epidemiologist

Stanley Manne
Children's Research Institute[®]
Smith Child Health Research,
Outreach and Advocacy Center

Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP, Director
Marie E. Heffernan, PhD, Associate Director
Tracie Smith, MPH, Senior Epidemiologist
Anne Bendelow, MPH, Data Analyst
Punreet Bhatti, MD, Research Associate

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information on
Voices of Child Health in Chicago, contact:
Mary Ann & J. Milburn Smith Child Health
Research, Outreach and Advocacy Center
Stanley Manne Children's Research Institute
Ann & Robert H. Lurie
Children's Hospital of Chicago
225 East Chicago Avenue, Box 157
Chicago, IL 60611-2991
voicesofchildhealth@luriechildrens.org
luriechildrens.org/voices

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