Teenagers, alcohol and other drugs 2019: What's happening, what's out there and how much influence do parents really have?

Paul Dillon
Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Outline of presentation

- Australian general population data – 2016 NDSHS
- Australian secondary school data - 2017 ASSAD
- three concerning drug trends amongst school-based young people
  - increasing cannabis use, 'normalization' of ecstasy/MDMA and 'nanging'
  - what about alcohol? Are things changing in that area?
    - what does research tell us about parental provision of alcohol?
  - how can parents make a difference? What influence do you have?
- three parenting tips that prevent or delay early drinking and illicit drug use
How many Australians have ever used illicit drugs?
Lifetime illicit drug use (%) - 14 years and over


- Cocaine: 9.0%
- Heroin: 1.3%
- Ecstasy: 11.2%
- Hallucinogens: 9.4%
- Meth/amphetamine: 6.3%
- Inhalants: 3.8%
- Cannabis: 34.8%
Never used illicit drugs (%) - 14 years and over


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<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
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<td>Heroin</td>
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<td>Meth/amphetamine</td>
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<td>Cannabis</td>
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Recent use of illicit drugs, people aged 14 years or over, by drug type, 1991-2016


DARTA Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Australian secondary school students and drug use

How many school-based young people have ever used drugs and are things changing?
Prevalence (%) of **lifetime drug use** (excluding tobacco, and alcohol) among 12-17 year old students, 2017


- Analgesics: 95%
- Tranquilisers: 20%
- Cannabis: 17%
- Inhalants: 18%
- Hallucinogens: 4%
- Amphetamines: 2%
- Steroids: 3%
- Opiates: 1%
- Cocaine: 2%
- Ecstasy: 6%
Prevalence (%) of **never used** drugs (excluding tobacco, and alcohol) among 12-17 year old students, 2017

Prevalence (%) of **lifetime drug use** among 12-17 year old students, 1996-2017

Three concerning drug trends amongst young people ...

More students being suspended/expelled due to cannabis, ecstasy/MDMA and pill testing, and increasing popularity of nitrous by the very young – important for parents to be aware of trends
Even though we have fewer young people using cannabis, more are getting caught with it? Why is this happening?
Lifetime cannabis use, Australian secondary school students (%), 1996-2017


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Are young people confused about cannabis' legal status? Changing attitudes around medicinal cannabis and more talk about legalizing cannabis, with some countries actually changing the law.
Since Colorado legalised cannabis in 2014, the cannabis 'edibles' industry has exploded. It has not been without controversy as many of the products are attractive to children.
Ecstasy/MDMA

Seen by some young people as far less harmful than other drugs, particularly alcohol – some taking great risks ...
Ever used ecstasy, Australian secondary school students (%), by age and gender, 2017


- 12 years: Male 3.0, Female 3.0
- 13 years: Male 4.0, Female 2.0
- 14 years: Male 5.0, Female 2.0
- 15 years: Male 6.0, Female 5.0
- 16 years: Male 10.0, Female 7.0
- 17 years: Male 16.0, Female 9.0

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Ever used ecstasy, Australian secondary school students (%), by age and gender, 2014-2017

Deaths at music festivals and calls for 'pill testing'

Suspected drug-related deaths at music festivals attracted great media attention and tougher policing and calls for pill testing polarized the community.
When you buy ecstasy, what are you likely to be getting?

What are you getting when you buy ecstasy or MDMA? What about 'pill testing'?
Pill testing: What does it tell us?

It can tell us what is in the powder, pill or capsule but it **cannot say what that substance will do to the user**

- different people take same substance - have different responses
- same people take same substance another time – different response
- deaths have not occurred in groups
- individuals who took the same thing as their friends died – often no 'reason'

Knowing what's in it doesn't mean it is 'safe'

Some people believe that if it is MDMA – that means it is 'safe'
MDMA does not mean 'safe'

People selling MDMA – not ecstasy – suggesting better quality and safety

MDMA can kill – take too much and it can cause overdose
MDMA fatal overdose:
Calling for help

Isobel Jones-Reilly - 15 years old – took two "pink pills" she found at a party at a friend's house. She became sweaty and kept pacing around in circles

"She was quite panicky. Her jaw was moving as well ... She went upstairs to lie down. We asked, should we call an ambulance. But Issy said no"

One hour after others noticed she was unwell - she fitted and started foaming at the mouth - 000 was called. She was unconscious when paramedics arrived

8 shots of adrenaline and 28 cycles of CPR were given but she died

Post-mortem found she died due to an MDMA overdose
Worrying trend in UK ecstasy-related deaths in 2018

Some deaths involved very young teens

- April – Leah Kelly, 15
- May – Shauna Davies, 15
- July – Hannah Bragg, 15
- July – Shakira Pellow, 15
- July – Reece Murphy, 16

Some deaths at festivals and nightclubs – others, particularly younger ones were not

- Shauna took ecstasy to walk on a mountain
- Hannah used to celebrate finishing exams
- Shakira took it in a park with 3 other 15-year-olds

Pill testing at festivals - not necessarily going to be effective in preventing these deaths
What if your teen is attending festivals and nightclubs?

If you are concerned, let them know and tell them why
Scare tactics don't work but 'real-life' stories can be helpful
- talk about deaths when they occur – start a conversation
- let them know at every opportunity that they can come to you and talk about anything at anytime

Let them know you are happy to be part of a plan if something goes amiss. If anything goes wrong with them or their friends, you will be there for them - no questions asked!

Discuss what to do in an emergency. Basic first aid skills, as well as how and when to call 000, may help save a life

Ensure they know the legal consequences
- drug detection dogs
- roadside (or mobile) drug testing (RDT or MDT)
- juvenile offences do not get removed from your record at 18!
If someone has taken an illegal drug and they are feeling unwell, don't wait – call 000!

If the drug's inside you, it's a health issue. If it's in your pocket, it's a law enforcement issue.
Save the app that could save your life

Emergency +

The most important app a young person will ever have on their smartphone
What is it and how dangerous is it for young people? Seen as 'harmless' fun by many but can result in death
Nitrous oxide

Nitrous oxide is a **dissociative anaesthetic**

- at low doses, it gives a sense of floating and separation from the body without causing unconsciousness
- used today by dentists as an anaesthetic and given to women in labour

1722 - first synthesised by English chemist, Joseph Priestly - used as a recreational drug at 'laughing gas parties'

- 1844 – began to be used as an aid to surgery
- 1868 – used to whip cream, make aerosols and increase engine performance
'Nanging' deaths and other harms

Thomas, J. & Jones, R. (2017) doctors warn of dangerous rise in use of 'nangs'. ABC News

Most nitrous-related deaths due to 'misadventure'
- death of 18-year-old at Schoolies – falling from a balcony
- calls for bans and/or restrictions

Director of Poisons Information Centre interviewed by 7.30 Report
- "We have had a doubling of the number of calls from hospitals about significantly affected people from nitrous oxide exposure"
- "... effects are severe nerve injury, or sometimes brain injury"
- deaths are rare but "... can relate to anything from the exploding of the small cylinders, to people becoming hypoxic – that is, short of oxygen, from overuse"
What do we know about school-based young people and alcohol? Are things changing in that area?
The number of Australian secondary school students aged 12-17 years who have never consumed alcohol has increased significantly, from around one in ten in 1999, to more than one in three in 2017. **Non-drinking appears to be increasingly seen as a viable option for young people.**
Respondents were classified as 'non-drinkers' (never had a glass of alcohol), 'moderate drinkers' (had a full glass but not more than four drinks on a single occasion in the last month) or 'risky drinkers' (had more than four drinks on one or more occasions in the last month). Although there are more small numbers of 'risky drinkers' in Years 8 and 9, it is Year 10 where things begin to change.
The survey no longer provides data for each age group, instead grouping students into either 12-15 years or 16-17 years. Of those young people who had drank alcohol in the previous week (i.e., ‘current drinkers’), the average number of drinks consumed was high across both age groups and across gender. Males consumed more alcohol than their female counterparts, with 16-17-year-old males drinking almost 9 standard drinks when they drank.
Teenage parties, gatherings and even sleepovers. What really goes on and how can you keep your teen safe at these events? Is parental provision of alcohol 'protective'?
"If I give it to them, at least I'll know what they're drinking": What does the research say?


Jan 2018 - ≈1900 parents and adolescents - 6-year period (12-17 years) association of exposure to parental supply and other sources of alcohol with subsequent drinking outcomes. **Was it protective?**

"... no evidence ... that parental supply protects from adverse drinking outcomes ... this practice is associated with risk, both directly and indirectly through increased access to alcohol from other sources."

"We found that parental provision of alcohol to their children is associated with subsequent binge drinking, alcohol-related harm(s) and symptoms of alcohol use disorder"

"... no evidence of any benefit or protective effect, either directly ... or indirectly"

"Parental supply is associated with increased risk of other supply, not the reverse"
What can parents do to keep their teens safe?

What does the research say is the best way to keep teens safe around alcohol and other drugs?
So what can a parent do around alcohol?

Cannot inoculate your teen - but you can ...

- **be a positive role model** – look at how you socialise with alcohol and talk about it
- **promote positive norms** - not everyone drinks and most don't drink irresponsibly
- **create rules and consequences** around alcohol and parties early, modify them as they get older but don't be influenced by others – stick to your guns!
- if things get out of hand, **seek professional help nice and early** – certain behaviour is not normal and needs to be addressed
So what can a parent do around other drugs?

Most school-based teens don't use other drugs, those who do so regularly usually have other issues

- **keep lines of communication open** – know their friends and show an interest in what they do
- **keep them busy** – making sure they have interests (sport, music, etc) and that you can be a part of that in some way is important
- **monitor their money** - alcohol and other drugs cost money – if they are spending a lot and you’re not seeing anything for it, start asking questions
- **certain activities are more likely to expose them to drugs** – dance events and nightclubs are linked to the ecstasy culture. Difficult to stop them going but discussion needs to be had on your expectations
Keep connected ...

Keeping 'connected' is so important but can be very difficult, particularly if you're saying 'no' all the time - going to be 'butting heads'.

Always be on the lookout for opportunities to say 'yes'.

Michael Riera talks about moving from a 'managing' role to a 'consulting' one during their teens. His book provides practical strategies to get you talking:

- use the car
- talk late at night, very late!
- taking them to a restaurant for dinner
- use of indirect communication – notes, emails, texts
- how to use the dinner table and how not to!
The final word ...

Tell your children they're great, all the time!
- there is always something positive you can find to say about your child - find it and say it!

Really listen to your child and 'connect'
- when did you last 'connect' with your child? Try to find the time at least once a week for a few minutes to really talk and listen to your child – it'll be worth it in so many ways!

Three simple golden rules ...
- know where your child is
- know who they're with
- know when they'll be home
For further information and contact details

For a PDF of a version of this presentation or references and supporting information, go to my website -
www.darta.net.au

Email - p.dillon@darta.net.au

Facebook - Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Twitter - @DARTAPDILLON
Instagram - dillonpauldarta