

20 Drugs and young people

Introduction

This chapter presents data on the use of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs by Australians aged 14–17 years. This group is a sub-group of the 14–19 year old age group presented in the other chapters of this report. The 14–17 year age group represents 7.1% of the population aged 14 years and over (7.4% of the male population and 6.8% of the female population).

Tobacco

Tobacco use

In 2001, around one in nine (11.5%) persons aged 14–17 years smoked tobacco daily (Table 20.1):

- Females were more likely than males to smoke daily (12.7% and 10.3% respectively); however, they were less likely than males to be weekly or less than weekly smokers.
- Four in five (81.7%) had never smoked, and 2.9% were ex-smokers.

Table 20.1: Tobacco smoking status, persons aged 14–17 years, by sex, Australia, 2001

Smoking status	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Daily	10.3	12.7	11.5
Weekly	2.1	1.4	1.8
Less than weekly	2.3	1.9	2.1
Ex-smokers	2.4	3.4	2.9
Never smoked	82.8	80.5	81.7

Means of obtaining

The sale of cigarettes to persons under the age of 18 years is illegal in all States and Territories in Australia. Persons aged 14–17 years who had used tobacco in the last 12 months were asked where they obtained this drug (Table 20.2):

- Under-age smokers most commonly obtained tobacco from a shop or retail outlet (82.6%). Females (86.0%) were more likely than males (79.0%) to do so.
- The second most commonly nominated means of obtaining tobacco was through friends or relatives (47.1%).

Table 20.2: Means of obtaining tobacco, smokers aged 14–17 years, by sex, Australia, 2001

Means of obtaining	Males	Females	Persons
	(per cent)		
Friend or relative	45.4	48.8	47.1
Bought at shop/retail outlet	79.0	86.0	82.6
Paid cash but not at retail outlet	26.4	25.8	26.1
Stole or traded goods or services	21.7	11.6	16.6
Other	19.2	13.5	16.3

Notes

1. Base equals those who reported smoking daily, weekly, or less than weekly.
2. Respondents could select more than one response.

Use of tobacco by friends and acquaintances

Respondents aged 14–17 years were asked what proportion of their friends and acquaintances smoked tobacco (Table 20.3):

- Three in five (60.2%) male smokers and three-quarters (74.7%) of female smokers reported that all or most of their friends or acquaintances smoked. In contrast, 10.1% of male and 14.9% of female ex-smokers or never smokers reported that all or most of their friends or acquaintances smoked.
- Although smokers reported only having friends and acquaintances who smoked (i.e. no friends or acquaintances who didn't smoke), some ex-smokers or never smokers reported that all or most of their friends or acquaintances smoked.

Table 20.3: Tobacco smoking by friends and acquaintances, persons aged 14–17 years, by tobacco smoking status and sex, Australia, 2001

Proportion of friends	Smoker ^(a)	Ex-smoker/ never-smoker	All
Males			
All or most	60.2	10.1	17.6
About half	31.8	20.5	22.2
A few	8.0	53.6	46.7
None	–	15.8	13.5
Females			
All or most	74.7	14.9	24.5
About half	17.8	21.5	20.9
A few	7.6	50.2	43.4
None	–	13.4	11.3
Persons			
All or most	67.4	12.4	20.9
About half	24.8	21.0	21.6
A few	7.8	51.9	45.1
None	–	14.7	12.4

(a) Daily, weekly and less often than weekly smokers.

Environmental tobacco smoke at home

- In 2001, more than one in two (58.9%) non-smokers aged 14–17 years lived in households where no-one regularly smoked cigarettes, cigars or pipes (Table 20.4).
- A greater proportion of female (23.6%) non-smokers aged 14–17 years than male non-smokers (20.9%) lived in a household where at least one other member smoked at least one cigarette, cigar or pipe per day in the home.

Table 20.4: Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in the home at least daily, non-smokers aged 14–17 years, by sex, Australia, 2001

Proportion	Male	Female	Persons
	(per cent)		
Yes, inside the home	20.9	23.6	22.2
No, only smokes outside the home	20.9	16.8	18.9
No-one at home regularly smokes	58.1	59.6	58.9

Alcohol

Alcohol consumption

Two-thirds (66.3%) of persons aged 14–17 years had consumed a full glass of alcohol in the last 12 months. Other findings include:

- Almost half (47.8%) of persons aged 14–17 years consumed alcohol less often than once a week in the last 12 months (Table 20.5).
- About one in five (18.2%) persons aged 14–17 years drank alcohol weekly.

Table 20.5: Alcohol drinking status, persons aged 14–17 years, by sex, Australia, 2001

Drinking status	Males	Females	Persons
	(per cent)		
Daily	0.2 *	0.5 *	0.3
Weekly	19.6	16.6	18.2
Less than weekly	44.3	51.6	47.8
Ex-drinkers ^(a)	6.6	4.3	5.5
Never drank a full glass	29.2	27.0	28.1

(a) Consumed a full serve of alcohol but not in the last 12 months.

- The proportion of persons aged 14–17 years (34.4%) who put themselves at risk (risky or high risk) of alcohol related harm in the short term on at least one drinking occasion during the last 12 months was similar to that for the whole population (34.4%).
- For the population aged 14 years and over, 9.9% drank at a risky or high risk level for alcohol-related harm in the long term. Among persons aged 14–17 years, this proportion represented 7.3%.
- Abstainers represented 17.5% of the population aged 14 years and over, and 33.6% among persons aged 14–17 years.

Means of obtaining

The sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 18 years is illegal in all States and Territories in Australia. Persons aged 14–17 years who had used alcohol in the last 12 months were asked how they obtained alcohol (Table 20.6):

- Among under-age drinkers, the most commonly nominated means of obtaining alcohol was a friend or relative (69.2%).
- Purchase from a shop or retail outlet was the next most commonly nominated means for obtaining alcohol among persons aged 14–17 years (47.1%). Female drinkers (49.9%) were more likely than male drinkers (44.1%) to obtain from a shop or retail outlet.

Table 20.6: Means of obtaining alcohol, recent drinkers aged 14–17 years, by sex, Australia, 2001

Means of obtaining	Males	Females	Persons
	(per cent)		
Friend or relative	65.6	72.6	69.2
Bought at shop/retail outlet	44.1	49.9	47.1
Paid cash but not at retail outlet	19.9	16.0	17.9
Stole or traded goods or services	10.4	4.9	7.6
Other	16.0	10.9	13.4

Notes

1. Base equals recent drinkers.
2. Respondents could select more than one response.

Alcohol consumption by friends and acquaintances

Respondents aged 14–17 years were asked what proportion of their friends and acquaintances consumed alcohol (Table 20.7):

- Three-quarters of male (73.0%) and female (78.0%) recent drinkers reported that all or most of their friends or acquaintances consumed alcohol. In contrast, 20.9% of male and 30.1% of female ex-drinkers or never drinkers reported that all or most of their friends or acquaintances consumed alcohol.
- Although almost all recent drinkers reported that their friends or acquaintances consumed alcohol, one-fifth (20.9%) of male and one-third (30.1%) of female ex-drinkers or never drinkers reported that all or most of their friends or acquaintances consumed alcohol.

Table 20.7: Alcohol consumption by friends and acquaintances, persons aged 14–17 years, by alcohol consumption status and sex, Australia, 2001

Proportion of friends	Recent drinker ^(a)	Ex-drinker/ never drinker ^(b)	All
Males			
All or most	73.0	20.9	54.2
About half	13.6	19.4	15.7
A few	13.0	48.1	25.7
None	0.3	11.6	4.4
Females			
All or most	78.0	30.1	63.2
About half	12.2	16.7	13.6
A few	8.7	35.9	17.1
None	1.1	17.3	6.1
Persons			
All or most	75.5	25.0	58.6
About half	12.9	18.2	14.7
A few	10.8	42.6	21.5
None	0.7	14.2	5.2

(a) Consumed a full serve of alcohol in the last 12 months.

(b) Ex-drinker was a person who had consumed a full serve of alcohol but not in the last 12 months; a never drinker was a person who had never consumed a full serve of alcohol.

Illicit drugs

Almost one-third (31.0%) of persons aged 14–17 years had used an illicit drug in their lifetime. When marijuana/cannabis use is excluded, this drops to 11.7% (Table 20.8). Of persons aged 14–17 years:

- Almost one-quarter (23.1%) had used an illicit drug in the last 12 months. The proportions were similar for males (23.3%) and females (23.0%).
- Fewer than one in 10 (8.4%) had used an illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis in the last 12 months. The proportion of female recent users (10.5%) was higher than for males (6.3%).
- One in five (20.7%) had used marijuana/cannabis in the last 12 months, the proportions for males and females were similar (21.3% and 20.1% respectively).

Table 20.8: Use of illicit drugs, persons aged 14–17 years, by sex, Australia, 2001

	Males	Females	Persons
Any illicit drug	(per cent)		
In lifetime	30.1	32.0	31.0
In last 12 months	23.3	23.0	23.1
Any illicit drug except marijuana/cannabis			
In lifetime	9.2	14.4	11.7
In last 12 months	6.3	10.5	8.4
Marijuana/cannabis			
In lifetime	27.8	27.6	27.7
In last 12 months	21.3	20.1	20.7