Drug abuse and addiction continue to be major concerns for Americans—but patterns of drug abuse change over time. Spotlight on... Drug Abuse Trends contains the most current information on where we are as a country in the ongoing battle against addiction.

A recent study funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse reveals that there are many changes in young people’s use and perceptions of various drugs. 1 There is some bad news and some good news, but this year the good outweighs the bad. But that’s not a get-out-of-jail-free card for our industry. In fact, it’s a call to stay current and that’s what this issue, Spotlight on... Drug Abuse Trends is all about. In order to depict characters and situations that are believable to viewers, reflecting reality is in order—and the only way to do that is to reflect the current patterns of use accurately and remind young people that prescription painkillers, inhalants, and stimulants, including cocaine and methamphetamine, are as dangerous as ever.

### AIDS Cases By Exposure Category and Sex Through 2002, Cumulative Number and Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure Category</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Overall total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-to-Male Sexual Contact</td>
<td>384,784</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injection Drug Use</td>
<td>151,367</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>58,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual Contact</td>
<td>36,692</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>63,379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 There is some bad news...

### We’ll give you the bad news first:

**Prescription Drugs** – Vicodin and OxyContin are among the most commonly abused illicit substances by high school students. Vicodin was used by 9.3% of 12th graders, 6.2% of 10th graders and 2.5% of 8th graders in 2004. OxyContin was used by 5% of 12th graders, 3.5% of 10th graders and 1.7% of 8th graders in 2004. These rates were not significantly different from the rates in 2003; however, when all three grades were combined, there was a significant increase in past year OxyContin use between 2002 and 2004. The fact is, prescription drug abuse is still a threat to our Nation’s youth.

**Inhalants** – Lifetime use (use at least once during a person’s lifetime) of inhalants increased significantly among 8th graders, from 15.8 percent in 2003 to 17.3 percent in 2004, continuing an upward trend noted among 8th graders last year, after several years of decline. There also appears to be a gradual decline since 2001 among 8th graders in the perceived risk of using inhalants. It is also important to note that inhalants is the only drug category for which use by 8th graders is higher than use by 10th and 12th graders.

Finally, research has found that even a single session of repeated inhalant abuse can disrupt heart rhythms and cause death from cardiac arrest or lower oxygen levels enough to cause suffocation.

### Now the good news:

**Any illicit drug** – There has been an approximately 17% decline over the last three years in use of any illicit drug in the 30 days prior to being interviewed (“past month use”) by students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades combined. Between 2003 and 2004 this same measure declined almost 7 percent. Marijuana – Past month use of marijuana was down significantly among 8th graders, from 7.5 percent in 2003 to 6.4 percent in 2004. Some strengthening of attitudes against marijuana use also occurred among 8th and 10th graders.
MDMA (Ecstasy) – Lifetime use of MDMA decreased significantly for 10th graders, from 5.4 percent in 2003 to 4.3 percent in 2004. Some strengthening of attitudes against use was seen among 10th and 12th graders. All grades had decreases in the perception of the availability of MDMA.

Heroin – A significant increase was noted in the percentage of 12th graders who perceive risk in using heroin occasionally without a needle. Among 8th graders, the perceived availability of heroin decreased significantly.

GHb and Ketamine – Significant decreases in annual use were seen among 10th graders for GHb, from 1.4 percent in 2003 to 0.8 percent in 2004, and Ketamine, from 1.9 percent in 2003 to 1.3 percent in 2004.

LSD – Use rates for LSD are the lowest they have been in the last 30 years. Lifetime use of LSD decreased significantly among 12th graders, from 5.5 percent in 2003 to 4.6 percent in 2004. The perceived availability of LSD decreased significantly among 8th graders. A significant increase was noted in the percentage of 12th graders who disapprove of using LSD once or twice.

Cigarettes/Nicotine – Cigarette smoking decreased significantly among 10th graders, from 43.0 percent in 2003 to 46.7 percent in 2004 for lifetime use and from 4.1 percent in 2003 to 3.3 percent in 2004 for those smoking one-half pack or more per day. The perception of harm from smoking one or more packs per day increased significantly among 8th and 10th graders from 2003 to 2004.

There are two areas in which we have received good and bad news.

Anabolic Steroids – Use of steroids decreased significantly among 8th graders, from 2.5 percent in 2003 to 1.9 percent in 2004 for lifetime use and from 1.4 percent in 2003 to 1.1 percent in 2004 for annual use. Among 10th graders, lifetime use decreased significantly continuing the decrease seen in 2003. Steroid use among 12th graders, however, remained stable at peak levels and perception of harm is decreasing. Only 56% of 12th grade students reported feeling that the use of steroids is harmful to one’s health (compared to 71% in 1992). When students view drugs as less harmful their levels of use often increase.

Methamphetamine – Significant decreases in methamphetamine use among eight graders have been detected, while usage among 10th and 12th graders appears to have stabilized. However, other surveillance mechanisms have recently shown that methamphetamine use is spreading to certain parts of the country to specific populations (e.g., Hawaii, west to Midwest, rural communities, and men who have sex with men). Additionally, from 1992 to 2002 admissions to treatment facilities for methamphetamine abuse increased by 420%.2

Reflecting Reality

The numbers are one thing—but what does all of it mean for your television show or movie? It means that the target demographic—your viewers—is changing, both in attitudes and behavior. We’re seeing a lot of intelligent young people on screen these days, reflecting the reality of how young people are maturing earlier. What we haven’t seen is a reflection of their more mature takes on substance abuse and addiction—including drugs, tobacco, and alcohol use. Think about it. With so many of your viewers thinking differently about getting high and drunk, consider thinking a little differently about how to show them. Here are some ideas for what today’s teens and young adults might do:

• Young people are more likely to turn down drugs than in the past, including at parties where drugs and alcohol may be prevalent. Consider reflecting this reality in your onscreen depictions.

• While use of some drugs is down, use of others such as inhalants, prescription painkillers, and stimulants such as methamphetamine continue to give cause for concern. Consider showing that many young are not aware or do not consider the dangers of these drugs.

• Due to the fact that high school students are seeing steroids as less harmful, compared to previous years, consider showing that these drugs still pose risks.

• Given that the two categories of drugs highlighted in the “bad news” section of this report, inhalants and prescription painkillers, are often found in the home, the issue of accessibility is of increasing importance. Consider showing that drugs can be easily obtained inside, as well as outside the home.

Other Factors To Consider:

Inhalants: A Refresher Course

Inhalants are increasingly on the nation’s radar as a dangerous and potentially devastating public health problem. But there’s an inherent problem in the word “inhalants”: What are they?

Inhalants are volatile substances that produce chemical vapors that can be inhaled to induce a psychoactive, or mind-altering, effect. Although other abused substances can be inhaled, the term “inhalants” is used to describe a variety of substances whose main common characteristic is that they are rarely, if ever, taken by any route other than inhalation.

Unlike other drugs, which are instantly recognizable by a name associated with one specific pill, needle, liquid or smokeable substance, inhalants run the gamut from propane tanks to whipped cream canisters—yes, whipped cream!—to compressed air cleaners for computers, and are readily available in everyone’s household. Because of this, many inhalants fly under the radar...and people are dying.

There are four main categories of inhalants:

Volatiles

• Paint thinner and remover
• Dry-cleaning fluids
• De-greasers
• Gasoline
• Glues
• Correction fluid (“white-out”)
• Markers

Aerosols

• Spray paint
• Deodorant sprays
• Hairspray
• Vegetable oil sprays
• Fabric protectors and refreshers

Nitriles, which have been sold using false labels such as:
• Video head cleaner
• Room deodorizer
• Leather cleaner
• Liquid aroma

Gases from...

• Butane lighters
• Propane tanks
• Whipped cream canisters
• Refrigerants

Performance Enhancing Drugs

In order to reach our audiences it is important that our industry reflect the changing cultural conditions in which drugs are abused. For example, we appear to be entering an era where being bigger and better is considered more important than how you get there. Medications are being used not just to cure ailments, but also to make up for perceived deficiencies and to gain a competitive edge. Thus, we are seeing a new pattern of drug abuse that is not triggered by the desire to get “high” but by the pressure to improve performance. This is not just the case for anabolic steroids, which have garnered a great deal of attention lately. There are reports that stimulants, including methylphenidate (Ritalin) and the amphetamines, are being abused by high school students to improve their scores on college entrance exams; by girls to achieve a body image that conforms to unrealistic standards; and by adults to cope with increasing responsibilities of living in a complex world that demands multitasking and high levels of productivity.

Drug-related HIV Continues

Since the HIV/AIDS epidemic began, injection drug use has directly and indirectly accounted for more than one-third (36 percent) of AIDS cases in the United States, and an estimated 28 percent of diagnosed AIDS cases among adults and adolescents were related to injection drug use in 2002. However, the link between HIV/AIDS and drug abuse involves more than just needles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that:

While an estimated 1 in 5 new HIV diagnoses for women is related to injection drug use, sharing injection equipment contaminated with HIV is not the only risk associated with substance use. Women who smoke or snort drugs may also be at high risk for sexual transmission of HIV if they sell or trade sex for drugs. Also, both casual and chronic substance users are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, such as unprotected sex, when they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.