

# Aboriginal youth use tobacco, illicit drugs and alcohol more than non-aboriginal youth

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Aboriginal-youth living off-reserve in Canada use tobacco, alcohol and drugs significantly more than non-Aboriginal youth and have higher health risks, according to an article in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

Despite the high prevalence of smoking among Aboriginal youth in Canada, there is a lack of information on their patterns of [tobacco use](#), especially among people living off-reserve. Most Aboriginals in Canada live off-reserve, and those 15 years of age and older are more likely than non-Aboriginals to have [chronic health conditions](#), to drink heavily and to smoke. Aboriginal youth also have higher rates of marijuana use.

Researchers compared smoking habits, use of other [tobacco products](#), alcohol and drugs as well as second-hand [smoke exposure](#) in 2620 off-reserve Aboriginal youth and 26 223 non-Aboriginal youth. All youth were in grades 9-12 and had participated in the 2008-2009 Youth Smoking Survey.

In the study, 24.9% of the Aboriginal respondents reported they were current smokers, 2.6% were previous smokers, and 72.4% were nonsmokers. In the non-Aboriginal youth, 10.4% were current smokers, 1.5% former smokers and 88.0% nonsmokers.

Exposure to [second-hand smoke](#) was more common for Aboriginal respondents than non-Aboriginal respondents.

Most of the respondents reported having tried alcohol (88.5% of Aboriginal and 84.2% of non-Aboriginal youth). The average age at which they first tried alcohol was considerably lower among Aboriginal youth. Among those who had tried alcohol, Aboriginal youth were more likely to engage in binge drinking (91.9% compared to 85.2% of non-Aboriginals). Aboriginal youth also used marijuana (62.0%) and other illicit drugs (34.8%) more frequently compared with non-Aboriginal youth (41.0% and 20.6% respectively).

"The high prevalence of smoking and use of other substances among Aboriginal youth living off-reserve highlights the need for culturally appropriate smoking cessation and substance prevention programs that target Aboriginal youth," writes Dr. Tara Elton-Marshall, Propel Centre for Population Health Impact, University of Waterloo, with coauthors.

Aboriginal females had higher rates of smoking, marijuana and other illicit drug use than male aboriginals.

"Most of the Aboriginal youth who identified themselves as current smokers, particularly females, reported that they had tried to quit at least once previously," wrote the authors. "This finding suggests that Aboriginal youth are interested in quitting but have not been successful and that they may require additional support to stop smoking."

"Our findings highlight the need for culturally appropriate prevention and cessation policies and programs for this at-risk population," conclude the authors.

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

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