

Study: US teens are drinking less, texting more

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

American teens are smoking less, drinking less and fighting less. But they're texting behind the wheel and spending a lot of time on video games and computers, according to the government's latest study of worrisome behavior.

Generally speaking, the news is good. Most forms of drug use, weapons

use and [risky sex](#) have been going down since the government started doing the survey every two years in 1991. Teens are wearing bicycle helmets and seat belts more, too.

"Overall, [young people](#) have more healthy behaviors than they did 20 years ago," said Dr. Stephanie Zaza, who oversees the risky-behavior study at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The results come from a study of 13,000 U.S. students last spring. Participation was voluntary and required parental permission, but responses were anonymous.

Highlights of the study released Thursday:

SMOKING

Fewer than 16 percent of the [teens](#) smoked a cigarette in the previous month—the lowest level since the government started doing the survey. The survey did not ask about [electronic cigarettes](#).

Meanwhile, more than 23 percent of teens said they used marijuana in the previous month. CDC officials said they could not tell if, or to what extent, marijuana or e-cigarettes have replaced traditional cigarettes among teens.

FIGHTING

Fights at school fell by half in the past 20 years. And there was a dramatic drop in kids reporting they had been in a fight anywhere in the preceding year—about 25 percent, down from 33 percent two years earlier. The addition of more guards and other security measures may be a factor, said school violence expert Todd DeMitchell of the University

of New Hampshire.

TEXTING

Among teen drivers, 41 percent had texted or emailed behind the wheel in the previous month. That figure can't be compared to the 2011 survey, though, because the CDC changed the question from the last time.

DRINKING

Fewer teens said they drank alcohol. Drinking of soda was down, too. About 35 percent said they had had alcohol in the previous month, down from 39 percent in 2011. About 27 percent said they drank soda each day. That was only a slight change from 2011 but a sizable drop from 34 percent in 2007.

SEX

The proportion of teens who had sex in the previous three months held steady at about 34 percent from 2011. Among them, condom use was unchanged at about 60 percent.

SUICIDE

The percentage who attempted suicide in the previous year held steady at about 8 percent.

MEDIA USE

TV viewing for three or more hours a day has stalled at around 32 percent since 2011. But in one of the largest jumps seen in the survey, there was a surge in the proportion of kids who spent three or more

hours on an average school day on other kinds of recreational screen time, such as playing video or computer games or using a computer or smartphone for something other than schoolwork. That number rose to 41 percent, from 31 percent in 2011.

Health experts advise that teens get no more than two hours of recreational screen time a day, and that includes all screens—including Xboxes, smartphones and televisions.

More information: CDC study:

www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm

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