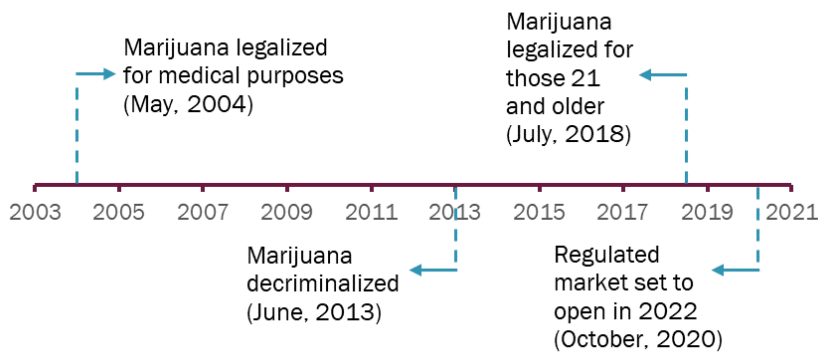


Marijuana use among Vermonters is consistently among the highest in the country and is the highest for 12-17- and 18-25-year-olds.ⁱ Its legal status in Vermont has changed significantly over the past two decades. In 2004, the Vermont legislature voted to legalize the use of marijuana for medical purposes and in 2013 penalties for possession of one ounce or less were reduced to a fine. In July 2018, legislation went into effect legalizing possession, private consumption, and limited cultivation among persons aged 21 years and older. Most recently, the Vermont legislature voted to create a regulated market which is set to open in October 2022. Marijuana remains illegal at the federal level.

Timeline of Marijuana-Related Legislation in Vermont



KEY POINTS

- **Marijuana use among youth and adults is increasing.**
- **Vaping as a primary method of use among high school students increased eight-fold between 2017 and 2019.**
- **Among high school students, peer and perceived parental disapproval of marijuana use have decreased over the past decade.**
- **Over the past five years, two-thirds of operators involved in fatal crashes suspected of driving under the influence of drugs had THC in their systems.**

Marijuana Use Among Vermont High Schoolersⁱⁱ

In 2019, 40% of Vermont high school students (grades 9-12) reported that they had used marijuana at least once in their lives. **Lifetime use** was statistically similar to 2009 (41%) but significantly higher compared to 2017 (37%).

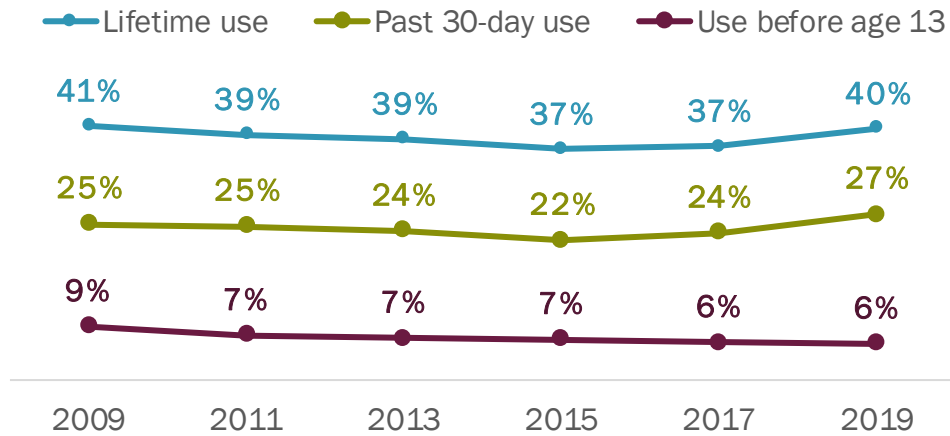
Although lifetime use has recently increased, **marijuana use before the age of 13** has steadily decreased over the past decade. Six percent of high schoolers reported using before they were 13 years old in 2019 – a significantly lower percentage than in 2009 (9%). This decrease is particularly important due to the association between early marijuana use and adverse health outcomes related to brain development, neurocognitive functioning, and mental health.ⁱⁱⁱ

High school students who reported using marijuana before age 13 were more likely to report past 30-day use than those who were older when they first used.

Marijuana Use

Past 30-day marijuana use in youth has significantly increased in recent years. In 2019, 27% of high school students reported using marijuana. This was significantly higher than past 30-day use in 2015 (22%) and 2017 (24%), but similar to 2009 (25%).

Marijuana Use Among High Schoolers in Vermont (2009 - 2019)

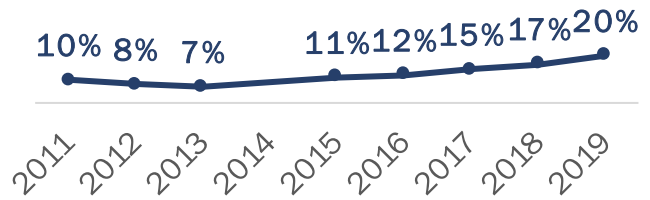


Data source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Marijuana Use Among Vermont Adults^{iv}

Twenty percent of Vermont adults (18+) reported using marijuana at least once in the past 30 days in 2019. Past 30-day use has steadily increased since 2013, when 7% of adults reported using. Use in 2019 was significantly higher compared to 2018 (17%).

Past 30-day marijuana use among adults has nearly tripled since 2013.

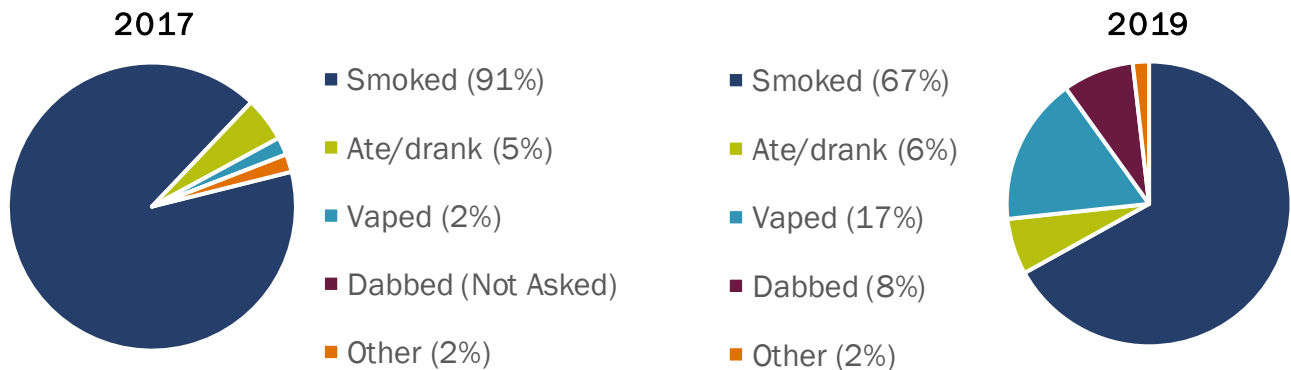


Data source: Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

Methods and Frequency of Use Among Those Who Used in the Past 30 Days

While most high school students who used marijuana in the last 30 days primarily smoked it, the proportion smoking it significantly decreased between 2017 (91%) and 2019 (67%). Students reported **vaping (17%)** and **dabbing (8%)** as the other most common primary methods of use in 2019. The proportion of students vaping increased eight-fold (17%) compared to 2017 (2%). Of note, dabbing was first added as a response option in 2019 and is the third-most reported method of use. Dabbing is a method of marijuana consumption where concentrated THC (sometimes called “shatter” or “budder”) is placed on a hot surface, aerosolized, and inhaled. This is typically done with a dab rig, which has a similar form to a traditional bong, or dab pen, which is similar to a vape pen.^v

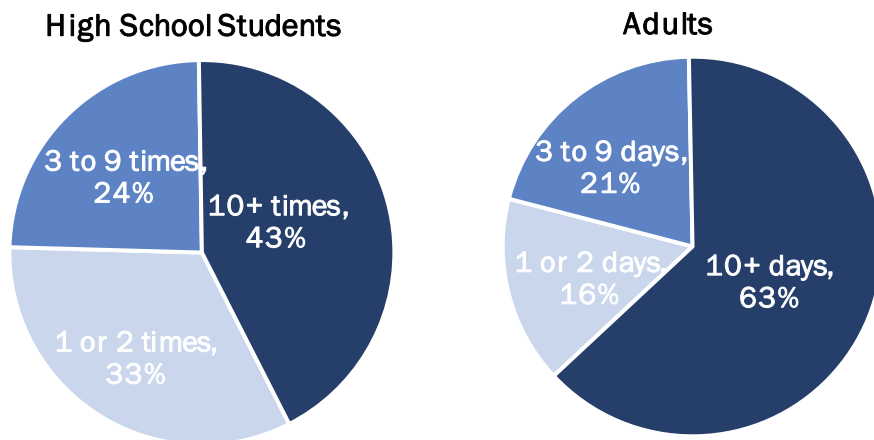
Vaping as a primary method of marijuana consumption among high school students increased eight-fold between 2017 and 2019.



Data source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

In 2019, 79% of Vermont adults using marijuana reported that they usually smoked it. Another 11% consumed it in a food or drink, 8% reported vaping, and 2% reported dabbing as their primary method of consumption. While these percentages have not changed significantly since the question was first asked in 2017, consumption via eating and drinking did increase from 5% in 2017 to 11% in 2019. This will be examined in future iterations of the BRFSS survey.

High school students and adults who used marijuana were more likely to use frequently – more than 4 out of 10 high schoolers used 10 or more times in the past 30 days while more than 6 out of 10 adults used on 10 or more days in the past 30 days.



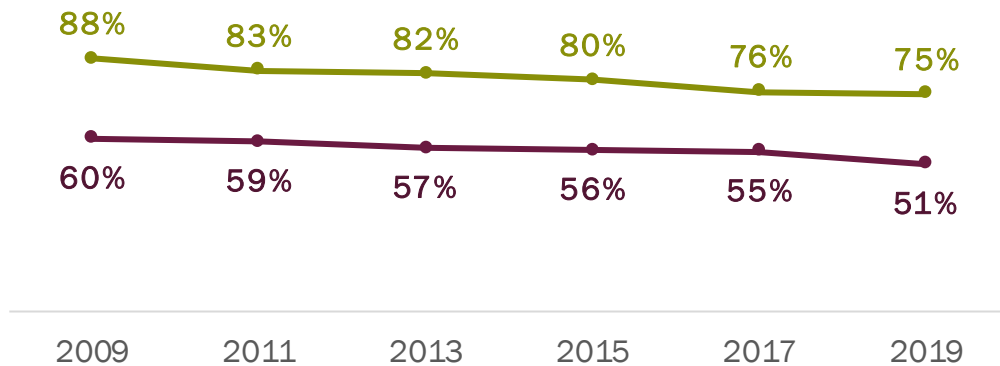
Data source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

Attitudes and Perceptions About Marijuana Use Among Vermont High Schoolers

Perceived parental disapproval of marijuana use has decreased significantly over the past decade. In 2019, 75% of students believed their parents would think it was wrong or very wrong for them to use marijuana, a significantly lower proportion than in 2009 (88%).

Similarly, peer disapproval of marijuana use has decreased significantly over the past decade. In 2019, half of all students (51%) believed it was wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use marijuana, a significantly lower proportion than in 2009 (60%).

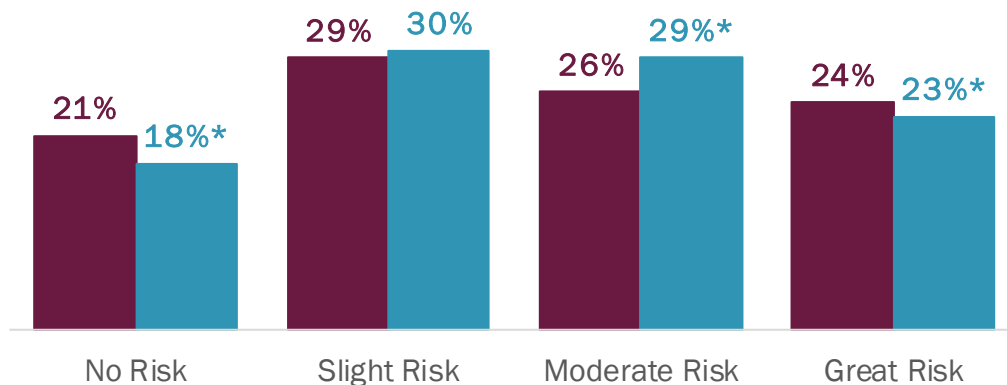
Perceived parental disapproval and peer disapproval of marijuana use have been decreasing over the past decade.



Data source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

In 2019, 82% of students believed that using marijuana regularly would lead to at least a slight risk of harm (physically or in other ways). This proportion was significantly higher compared to 2017 (79%). The proportion of students who believed regular use would lead to moderate risk significantly increased between 2017 (26%) and 2019 (29%), while the proportion who saw a great risk in regular use significantly decreased from 24% to 23%.

Students in 2019 were more likely to believe regular marijuana use was risky than students in 2017.



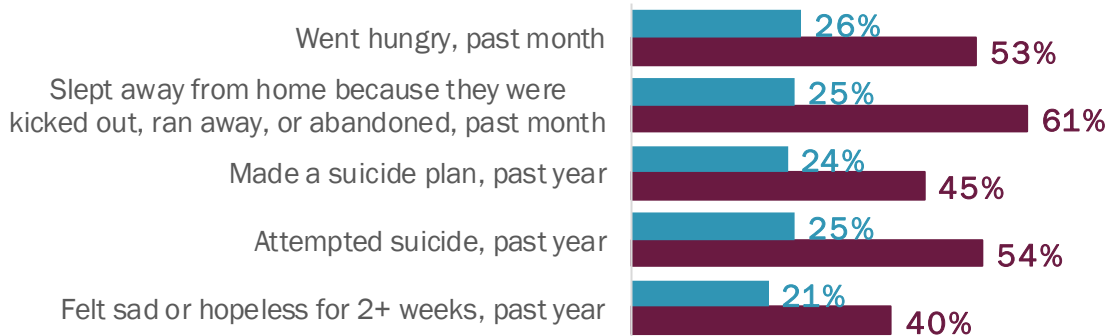
Data source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

*Indicates a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$).

Marijuana Use Among Youth and Adults by Mental Health and Life Circumstances

Marijuana use differed significantly by a number of indicators related to mental health and individual life circumstances for youth and adults alike. Among high school students in 2019, those who reported feeling sad or hopeless for at least two weeks, making a suicide plan, or attempting suicide in the past year were twice as likely to report past 30-day marijuana use as students who did not report these. Students who experienced food or housing insecurity in the past month were also twice as likely to report marijuana use than students who were food or housing secure. YRBS and BRFSS provide point in time estimates. Therefore, we cannot say that poor mental health or adverse life circumstances lead to marijuana use or vice versa, only that there is an association.

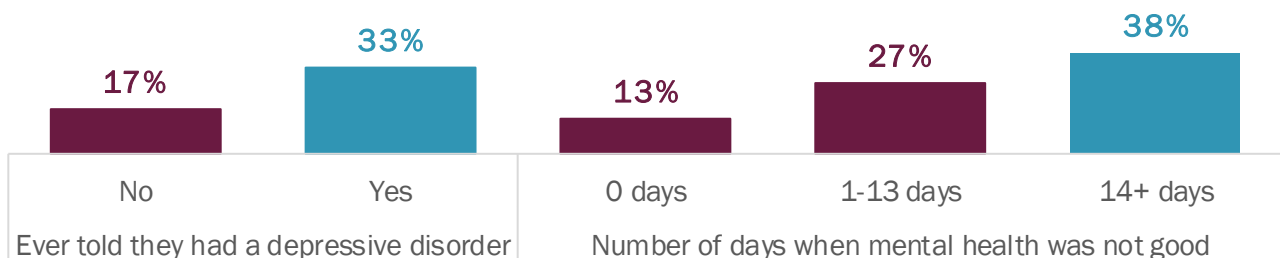
Past 30-day marijuana use was twice as high among students who experienced poor mental health or adverse life circumstances compared to those who did not.



Data source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

In 2019, adults who reported having a depressive disorder or poor mental health were significantly more likely to report past 30-day marijuana use than those who did not report these. Poor mental health was defined as 14 or more days in the past 30 days when mental health was self-reported as not good. Adults who had a depressive disorder were nearly twice as likely to use marijuana in the past 30 days than those who did not have a depressive disorder (33% vs 17%). Marijuana use also significantly increased by the number of days adults reported that their mental health was not good. Of those who did not have any days where mental health was not good only 13% reported using marijuana, while those who had 1-13 (27%) or 14 or more (38%) reported use at two and three times that rate, respectively.

Adults with depressive disorder or poor mental health were more likely to use marijuana in the past 30 days than those without.



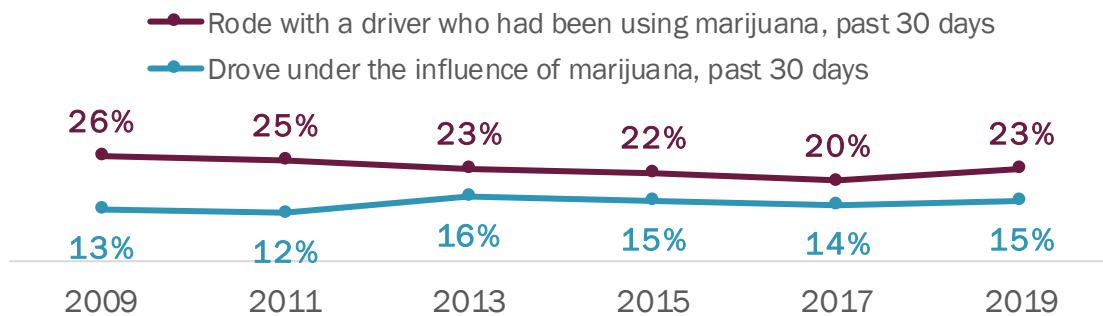
Data source: Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

Marijuana and Traffic Safety

In 2020, there were 57 total fatal crashes resulting in 61 total fatalities in Vermont. Drug involvement was suspected in 19 operators, out of which, THC – the psychoactive compound found in marijuana – was confirmed in 12. Notably, each of these totals has increased since 2019 despite decreases in travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past five years, two-thirds of operators involved in fatal crashes who were suspected of driving under the influence of drugs had THC in their systems.^{vi}

In 2019, **15% of students who drove reported that they had done so while under the influence of marijuana** at least once in the past 30 days. This rate was statistically similar to 2017 (14%). Nearly a quarter (**23%**) of students rode with someone who had been using marijuana in 2019. Although this was a significant decrease compared to 2009 (26%), it was a significant increase compared to 2017 (20%).

Risk Behaviors Associated with Marijuana Use Among High Schoolers (2009-2019)



Data source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey

In 2019, 26% of Vermont adults who reported using marijuana in the past month said they had driven at least once within three hours of using it in the past month. This was higher than the 23% who reported driving after using marijuana in 2018 and lower than the 31% reporting in 2016, however neither change was statistically significant.

Key Takeaways

Marijuana use has increased among youth and adults while perceptions about parental and peer disapproval of use have decreased in recent years. As attitudes and perceptions, mechanisms of use, and the regulatory framework shift at the state and national levels, continued surveillance of marijuana use and any associated outcomes, is necessary. Of particular interest is the recent increase in vaping among high school students, which saw an eightfold increase between 2017 and 2019.

Vermont has the highest rate of past 30-day marijuana use among 12-17- and 18-25-year-olds compared to all other states.ⁱ

For data questions: Jeffrey Trites, Jeffrey.Trites@vermont.gov

For more information on marijuana/cannabis: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/alcohol-drugs/lets-talk-cannabis>

References and Data Sources:

- i 2018/2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH):
<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-2019-nsduh-state-prevalence-estimates>
- ii Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS): <https://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/population-health-surveys-data/youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs>
- iii Marijuana Regulation in Vermont: 2017 Literature Review Update:
https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2017/02/ADAP_HIA%20Update.pdf
- iv Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS):
<https://www.healthvermont.gov/health-statistics-vital-records/population-health-surveys-data/brfss>
- v CDC E-Cigarette, or Vaping, Products Visual Dictionary:
https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/pdfs/ecigarette-or-vaping-products-visual-dictionary-508.pdf
- vi Vermont State Highway Office – Behavioral Safety Unit:
https://shso.vermont.gov/sites/ghsp/files/documents/Fatal%20Crashes%20May%2026,%202020-1_May%2031,%202021.pdf