

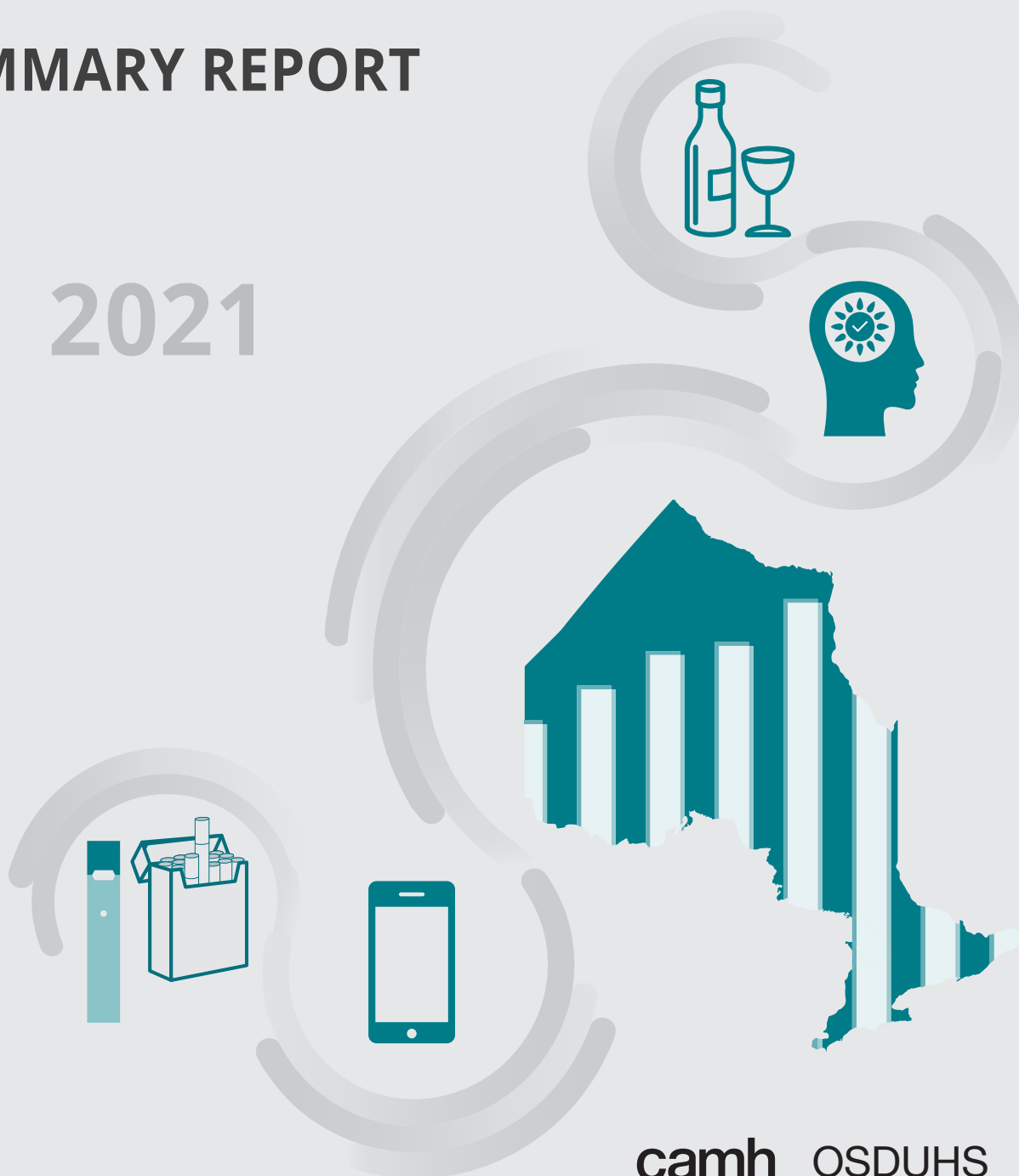
The **Well-Being of Ontario Students:**

Findings from the 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey

with French summary within | avec résumé en français à l'intérieur

SUMMARY REPORT

2021



camh

OSDUHS
Ontario Student Drug
Use and Health Survey

KEY FINDINGS

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS) has been conducted every two years since 1977, making it the longest ongoing school survey of adolescents in Canada, and one of the longest in the world. Between March and June 2021, a total of 2,225 students in grades 7 to 12 from 122 schools in 31 school boards participated in the 2021 cycle of the OSDUHS. All data are based on students' self-reports derived from anonymous questionnaires completed online. The online questionnaire could be completed by students anywhere, anytime. The survey was administered by the Institute for Social Research (at York University) on CAMH's behalf.

This report provides an overview of the main findings from the 2021 OSDUHS cycle and comparisons with 2019 where possible. The topics covered in this report include drug use, mental health, physical health, social media and technology, video gaming, gambling, school and family-related indicators. The survey also asked students about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their lives. Of note, the 2021 OSDUHS was administered during unprecedented circumstances as all Ontario schools were closed to in-person learning and students were learning remotely/virtually during almost all of the data collection period. The findings presented in this report provide a snapshot in time showing student well-being during the pandemic.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC EXPERIENCES

- Over half (59%) of students feel depressed about the future because of COVID-19.
- Over one-third (39%) of students feel that the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health "very much" or "extremely."
- One-quarter (26%) of students feel that online learning from home (due to the pandemic) is very difficult or extremely difficult.
- One-quarter (24%) of students report that their relationship with their parents/guardians became a bit worse or a lot worse during the pandemic.

59% Feel depressed about the future because of COVID-19

39% COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected mental health

26% Very/extremely difficult to learn online from home

24% Relationship with parents became worse

SCHOOL AND FAMILY

- Just under half (42%) of students in grades 7–12 report that they like school very much or quite a lot. Most students (74%) feel close to the people at their school. A similar percentage (74%) feel like they are part of their school. The vast majority (91%) feel safe at school.
- Almost one-third (30%) of students report low subjective social status at school (i.e., feeling that other students exclude them and do not respect them). About one-in-five (21%) students report being bullied at school (in any way) since September.
- One-in-eight (12%) students report being suspended or expelled from school at least once in their lifetime.
- Over one-third (39%) report that they “rarely” or “never” talk to a parent about their problems or feelings.
- About half (49%) of students report eating the evening meal with at least one parent everyday.

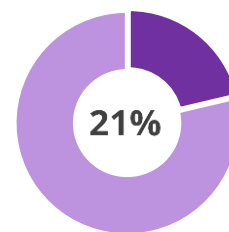
91% Feel safe at school

74% Feel close to people at school

74% Feel like part of their school

42% Like school a lot/very much

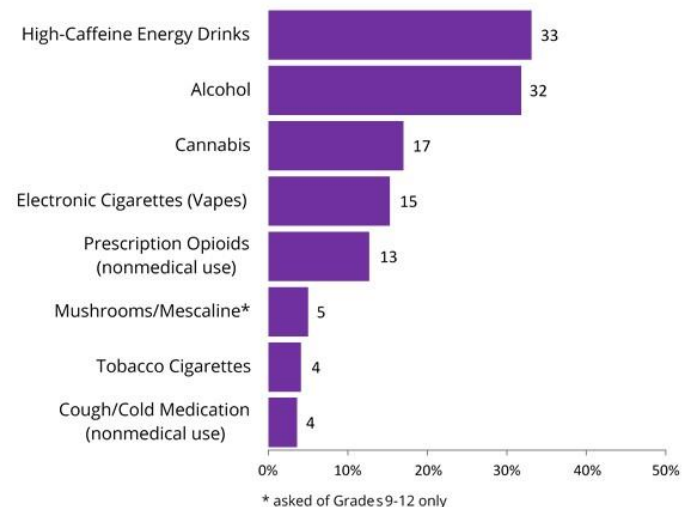
% of students reporting having been bullied at school since September



DRUG USE

- The most commonly used drugs among students in grades 7–12 are high-caffeine energy drinks, alcohol, and cannabis.
- About 8% of students report binge drinking (five or more drinks on one occasion) at least once in the past month.
- A majority (84%) of those who report vaping/using e-cigarettes in the past year report vaping nicotine.
- Among secondary school students, the most common ways of using cannabis are using it in a vaping device (17%), smoking it in a pipe/bong (17%), and eating it in a food product such as brownies or candy (15%).
- One-in-seven (14%) secondary school students report that they used cannabis to cope with a mental health problem at least once in the past year.
- Students report that alcohol and e-cigarettes/vapes are the most readily available drugs/substances (i.e., they are easy to obtain).

% of students reporting past year drug use



% of students reporting that it is “fairly easy” or “very easy” to get

Alcohol 61%

E-cigarettes/Vapes 56%

Tobacco Cigarettes 45%

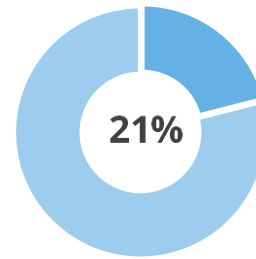
Cannabis 41%

Opioids 9%

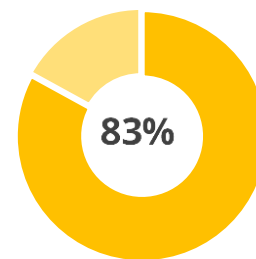
PHYSICAL HEALTH

- One-in-five (20%) students in grades 7–12 rate their physical health as “fair” or “poor.”
- About one-in-ten (9%) students report experiencing a concussion in the past year.
- About half (49%) of students report getting at least eight hours of sleep on a school night. Therefore, 51% are not getting at least eight hours of sleep.
- Only about one-in-five (21%) students are physically active on a daily basis for at least 60 minutes.
- Well over three-quarters (83%) of students spend three hours or more a day in front of an electronic screen in their *free time* (“recreational screen time”).
- Almost half (46%) of students are preoccupied with (i.e., constantly worried about) their weight or body shape.

% of students reporting daily physical activity



% of students reporting three hours or more per day of recreational screen time



MENTAL HEALTH

- Over one-third (38%) of students in grades 7–12 rate their mental health as “fair” or “poor.”
- One-third (32%) of students report experiencing an elevated level of stress or pressure in their lives.
- About one-in-five (18%) often or always feel lonely.
- About half (47%) of students indicate a moderate-to-serious level of psychological distress (symptoms of anxiety and depression). Over one-quarter (26%) indicate a serious level of psychological distress.
- One-in-five (20%) students report harming themselves on purpose in the past year. Almost the same proportion (18%) report that they seriously contemplated suicide in the past year.
- Just under half (42%) of students report that, in the past year, there was a time they wanted to talk to someone about a mental health problem, but did not know where to turn.

47% Moderate-to-serious psychological distress

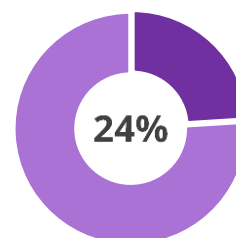
38% Fair/poor self-rated mental health

26% Serious psychological distress

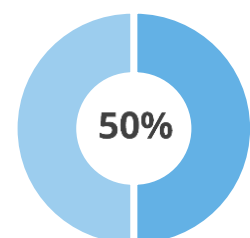
20% Harmed self on purpose

18% Serious suicidal thoughts

% of students worried about climate change

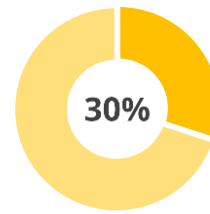


% of students depressed about the future because of climate change

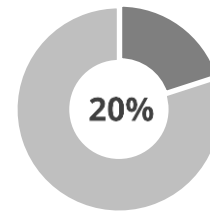


SOCIAL MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY, VIDEO GAMING, AND GAMBLING

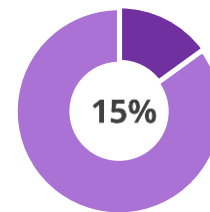
- The vast majority (91%) of students in grades 7–12 use social media on a daily basis. Almost one-third (31%) spend five hours or more on social media daily.
- Almost one-third (30%) of students report being cyberbullied at least once in the past year.
- About one-in-six (18%) secondary school students report symptoms that may suggest a moderate-to-serious problem with technology use. About 5% report symptoms suggesting a serious problem with technology use.
- About one-quarter (24%) of students play video games for five hours or more on a daily basis. One-in-five (20%) students meet the criteria for a video gaming problem.
- About one-quarter (26%) of students report gambling money on at least one activity in the past year. The most prevalent activity is online gambling (15%).



% of students reporting having been cyberbullied





% of students reporting symptoms of a video gaming problem



% of students reporting gambling with money online

SIGNIFICANT SEX DIFFERENCES

 Males are more likely to:	 Females are more likely to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ report being suspended or expelled from school ▪ use cough/cold medication nonmedically ▪ cyberbully others ▪ play video games daily ▪ spend 5 hours or more playing video games daily ▪ indicate a video gaming problem ▪ bet virtual credits in a video game ▪ gamble money (any) ▪ gamble money online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ report low subjective social status at school ▪ use prescription opioids nonmedically ▪ be preoccupied with their weight/body shape ▪ skip meals for health/weight reasons ▪ perceive themselves as “too fat” ▪ report trying to lose weight ▪ rate their mental health as fair or poor ▪ report elevated stress ▪ indicate psychological distress ▪ report an unmet need for mental health support ▪ spend more time on social media daily ▪ spend more time on electronic devices daily in free time ▪ indicate a problem with technology use ▪ report that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected their mental health ▪ feel depressed about the future because of COVID-19

SIGNIFICANT GRADE DIFFERENCES

↑ Increases with grade:	↓ Decreases with grade:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ not eating the evening meal with parents ▪ alcohol use ▪ cannabis use ▪ e-cigarette use/vaping ▪ fair/poor self-rated physical health ▪ 3 hours or more a day of recreational screen time ▪ preoccupation with body weight ▪ binging on food ▪ fair/poor self-rated mental health ▪ elevated stress ▪ psychological distress ▪ visiting a professional for mental health ▪ seeking counselling over the phone/internet ▪ unmet need for mental health support ▪ worry about climate change ▪ 5 hours or more a day on social media ▪ 7 hours or more a day on electronic devices in free time ▪ difficulty learning online from home ▪ reporting that their relationship with parents worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic ▪ reporting that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected their mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ feeling close to people at school ▪ feeling like part of one's school ▪ feeling safe at school ▪ getting at least eight hours of sleep on a school night ▪ daily physical activity

SIGNIFICANT DECREASES BETWEEN 2019 AND 2021

	2019		2021
Feel close to people at school (agree)	85%	↓	74%
Feel like part of school (agree)	82%	↓	74%
E-cigarette use/vaping (past year)	23%	↓	15%
Alcohol use (past year)	42%	↓	32%
Binge drinking (past month)	15%	↓	8%
Hazardous/Harmful Drinking (past month) [†]	14%	↓	5%
Cough/Cold Medication (nonmedical use, past year)	8%	↓	4%
Concussion (past year)	15%	↓	9%
Always/often go to school or bed hungry	6%	↓	3%

[†] among grades 9-12 only

SIGNIFICANT INCREASES BETWEEN 2019 AND 2021

	2019		2021
Low subjective social status at school	23%	↑	30%
Nonmedical use of prescription opioids (past year)	11%	↑	13%
Fair/poor self-rated physical health	11%	↑	20%
8 hours or more of sleep on school nights	37%	↑	49%
3 hours or more a day of recreational screen time	71%	↑	83%
Fair/poor self-rated mental health	27%	↑	38%
Serious psychological distress (past month)	21%	↑	26%
Fair/poor ability to cope with difficult problems	23%	↑	34%
Sought counselling over the phone/internet (past year)	5%	↑	9%
Unmet need for mental health support (past year)	35%	↑	42%
5 hours or more a day on social media	21%	↑	31%
7 hours or more a day on social media	7%	↑	14%
Been cyberbullied in the past year	22%	↑	30%
5 hours or more a day on electronic devices in free time†	35%	↑	52%
7 hours or more a day on electronic devices in free time†	12%	↑	26%
Playing video games daily	24%	↑	42%
5 hours or more a day playing video games	11%	↑	24%
Video gaming problem	14%	↑	20%
Gambling money online	4%	↑	15%

† among grades 9-12 only

Please visit the OSDUHS webpage for reports and FAQs:

www.camh.ca/osduhs