Good news, and bad, about substance use and abuse

By ACSH Staff — July 22, 2011

A large government study has found that fewer teens and young adults view heavy smoking [1] as a high-risk activity. Released Thursday by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the National Survey on Drug Abuse and Health interviewed 137,000 people and found that the percentage of teens who believed that smoking a pack or more of cigarettes each day posed a great health risk fell to 67.7 percent in 2008-09 from 69.3 percent in 2007-08. Nevertheless, the rate of smoking among teenagers continued to drop, from 9.5 percent in 2007-08 to 9 percent in 2008-09.

This same study also found that nearly one in four Americans binge drink [2]. However, the rate of underage binge drinking has declined since 2002 from 19.2 percent in 2002-03 to 17.7 percent in 2008-09.

Though the differences in the percentages appear small, the large number of participants may render them statistically significant, says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. These findings are quite disconcerting," he notes. "While the decline in teenage smoking and underage drinking is hopeful, the fact that 9 percent of them are still smoking, and nearly 18 percent of those under 21 are drinking illegally, reflects how easy it is for kids to get around the laws.

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