

# Substance Use Risks among LGBTQ Youth in Arizona

The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals troubling substance use patterns among Arizona high school students identifying as gay, lesbian and bisexual (unfortunately the 2017 YRBS did not include transgender students). Compared to their non-LGB peers, Arizona's LGB students report a higher prevalence of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use, suffer more consequences associated with substance use, and report a higher prevalence of substance use risk factors. These risks were supported through focus group research as well. The findings highlight an urgent need for more effective substance use prevention interventions targeted towards LGB youth.



## Alcohol Use

Alcohol use is significantly higher among LGB students than their non-LGB peers.

**53%**

of LGB students currently drink

More than half of LGB students report drinking alcohol in the past month, compared to only 31% of non-LGB students.

**32%**

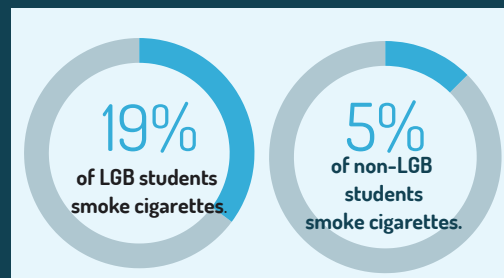
of LGB students currently binge drink

1 in 3 LGB students report binge drinking compared to 17% of non-LGB students. Binge drinking is defined as 4 or more drinks for females and 5 or more drinks for males in a few hours.



## Cigarette Use

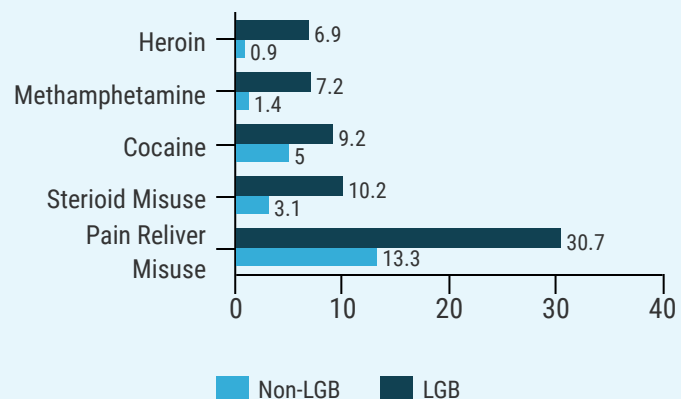
Nearly 1 in 5 LGB high school students report that they currently smoke cigarettes, which is 4 times higher than the prevalence of cigarette smoking among non-LGB students



## Drug Use

LGB students are over twice as likely to report past month marijuana use than their non-LGB peers (38% vs 17%). Reports of lifetime drug use are also higher for LGB students. Lifetime misuse of pain relievers is the most commonly used substance, with 31% of LGB students reporting misuse, compared to only 13% of non-LGB students. Heroin use is 7 times more common among LGB high school students (6.9% vs 0.9%), mostly due to a much higher lifetime prevalence of heroin use among male gay and bisexual students (18%).

Lifetime Drug Use by Sexual Identity (%)



Notes: Pain reliever misuse is defined as taking medicine without a prescription or differently than as instructed by a doctor. Steroid misuse is defined as ever taking steroid without a prescription. All differences are at least marginally significantly at  $p < 0.10$ , except for differences in lifetime cocaine use which had a p-value of 0.13.

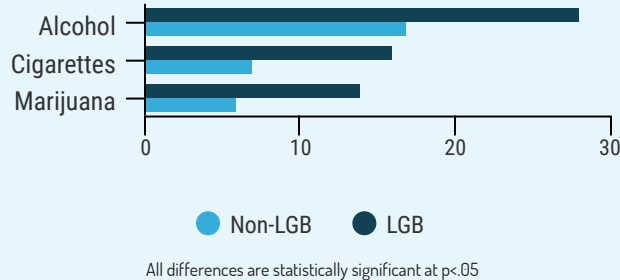
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# Substance Use: Risk Factors and Consequences

## First Substance Use Before 13

Early age of substance use initiation is an important predictor of later substance use, dependence and abuse. LGB students are significantly more likely to report that they tried alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana before the age of 13 than non-LGB students.

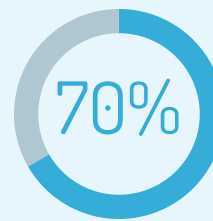
First Substance Use Before Age 13 (%)



## Victimization and Distress

Psychological distress and victimization are associated with higher rates of substance use (Newcomb, 2012). Compared to non-LGB students, LGB students report more past year :

- bullying at school (41% vs 15%),
- electronic bullying (32% vs 13%),
- physical fighting (31% vs 18%), and
- ever been forced to have sexual intercourse (23% vs 6%).

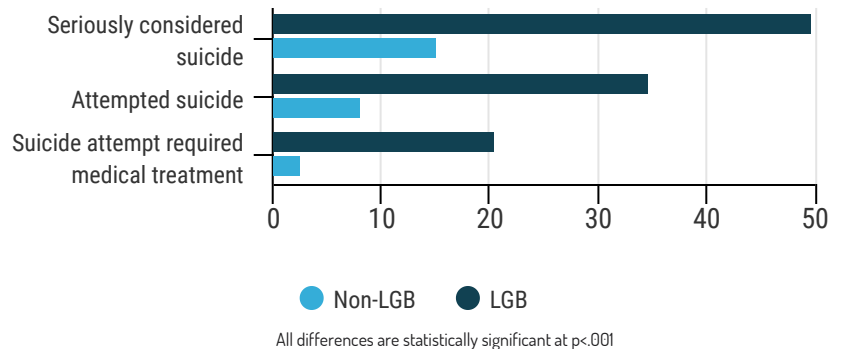


70% of LGB students reported **persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year** compared to 32% of their non-LGB peers

All differences are statistically significant at  $p < .001$

**Suicide is a leading cause of death among those who abuse alcohol and drugs (SAMHSA, 2016). LGBTQ youth are already at an elevated risk for suicide and suicide attempts. Substance use may compound these risks.**

Report of Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors (%)



Focus groups conducted with the LGBTQ community across Arizona identified two major causal factors leading to substance use:

- (1) Minority stress and
- (2) A lack of appropriate, affordable, accessible, LGBTQ friendly mental health services

Suggestions for improved prevention efforts included:

- 1) Safe, substance free, non-judgmental LGBTQ spaces to connect and engage with others
- 2) Better access to appropriate LGBTQ friendly mental health services
- 3) Educating the community on how to be better LGBTQ allies including physicians, parents and teachers

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2017). High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Retrieved from <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/>  
 - Newcomb, M. E., Heinz, A. J., & Mustanski, B. (2012). Examining Risk and Protective Factors for Alcohol Use in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: A Longitudinal Multilevel Analysis. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 73(5), 783-793.  
 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2016). In Brief: Substance Use and Suicide: A Nexus Requiring a Public Health Approach (HHS Publication No. SMA 16-4935, NSDUH Series H-52). Rockville, MD Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA16-4935/SMA16-4935.pdf>