HEALTH PROFILE FOR
NOVA SCOTIA
NOVA SCOTIA HEALTH PROFILE

This Health Profile for Nova Scotia details results from Health Canada's 2014/2015 Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey (CSTADS). Grade 6-12 students with parental permission from randomly selected schools in each province were invited to participate in the pan-Canadian survey. Participating students were asked questions about tobacco, alcohol and drug use, in addition to questions about bullying, school connectedness and mental wellness. Note: Only students in grades 7-12 were asked questions about alcohol and drug use.

In Nova Scotia, 4267 students from 25 randomly selected schools participated in the survey.

Health Canada has contracted the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact at the University of Waterloo to centrally coordinate the implementation of CSTADS across Canada biennially since 2004. The 2014/2015 CSTADS was implemented in collaboration with the following provincial partners:

- Memorial University of Newfoundland
- Dalhousie University
- University of Prince Edward Island
- New Brunswick Health Council
- Université du Québec à Montréal
- University of Waterloo
- University of Manitoba
- University of Saskatchewan
- University of Alberta
- University of Victoria

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CSTADS data were collected on behalf of Health Canada to understand Canadian trends in tobacco, alcohol and drug use, and to effectively develop, implement, and evaluate strategies, policies and programs aimed at youth substance use and abuse. The results of the survey are provided to Health Canada in a manner that does not identify any participants in the survey. Health Canada has not reviewed, approved, nor endorsed this report. Any views expressed or conclusions drawn herein do not necessarily represent those of Health Canada.
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PLEASE NOTE:
1. The graphs and tables in this profile represent student self-reported data.
2. In some cases, the results in table columns or rows and graphs may not add to 100% due to rounding.
3. * indicates that data are NOT reportable due to low numbers or high variability.
4. ‡ indicates estimates should be interpreted with caution because of moderate sampling variability.
THE ISSUE

This profile presents results for Nova Scotia on 5 interconnected issues facing students that impact their well-being. The following table shares information about the impact and prevalence of these issues for students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Wellness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mental wellness is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Approximately 20% of people with a mental disorder also have a substance use problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In Canada, 36% of students in grades 6-12 reported being bullied (2014/2015 CSTADS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effective bullying prevention programs involve the whole school and focus not only on reducing incidents of bullying, but also on promoting a positive school climate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tobacco Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Everyday 100 Canadians (2 school buses full of people) die from tobacco use – that’s 37,000 people each year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In Canada, 31% of students who have never smoked a cigarette reported not being confident in their ability to remain smoke free (2014/2015 CSTADS).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• “Alcohol is involved in more regrettable moments, crimes and traffic fatalities than all other drugs of abuse combined.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In Canada, 24% of students in grades 7-12 reported binge drinking (5 or more drinks on one occasion) in the past 12 months (2014/2015 CSTADS).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marijuana Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Despite the health risks, marijuana use has become more normative and is the most common substance of daily use by adolescents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In Canada, 22% of students in grades 7-12 reported that they have tried marijuana before (2014/2015 CSTADS).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MENTAL WELLNESS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Mental wellness is the ability to think, feel and act in ways that strengthen our capacity to enjoy life and deal with challenges as they arise. Students with higher levels of mental wellness tend to report higher levels of school connectedness and exhibit more pro-social behaviours, such as helping people or sharing things without being asked. Alternatively, students with lower levels of mental wellness tend to report more behaviours that are oppositional.

Schools can develop targeted programs, policies, curricula, and environments (that is, a culture) that fosters “mentally well” students by supporting their relatedness, competency and autonomy.

![Graph showing student mental wellness in Nova Scotia](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>NS 2014 CSTADS</th>
<th>Canada 2014 CSTADS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My family and friends like and care about me</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to spend time with my parents and friends</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I do things well</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my family and friends think I am good at things</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel free to express myself to family and friends</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I am given the opportunity to make choices with my family and friends</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% OF STUDENTS RESPONDING "SORT OF TRUE FOR ME" OR "REALLY TRUE FOR ME"
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN NOVA SCOTIA

Schools, homes, and community are key environments influencing student wellness. We know that schools influence wellness independent of family, economic, and community factors\(^8\). **Schools hold a unique position to create a culture of wellness, ideally in partnership with parents and community members/organizations.** This culture embraces the physical and social environment within the school. This culture is foundational to healthy behaviour choices and academic success.

SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS

Students who feel an attachment to their school and who consider their teachers supportive are less likely to engage in unhealthy or risky behaviours\(^8\).

### SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS IN NOVA SCOTIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>NS 2014 CSTADS</th>
<th>NS 2012 YSS</th>
<th>Canada 2014 CSTADS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel close to people at my school</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am part of my school</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy to be at my school</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel the teachers at my school treat me fairly</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe at my school</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Schools Can Make Mental Wellness a Priority**

- Schools can try to ensure every student is connected with an adult at the school. For example, schools can post all student names on a wall and ask staff to mark whom they “know”. Schools can then plan to build connections with students who are not linked in.
- Schools can foster positive mental wellness habits through physical activity, journaling, learning to cope with negative thoughts, setting goals and sharing humour\(^9\).
- Schools can involve staff in identifying and fostering students’ innate strengths by providing opportunities for student leadership in activities such as tutoring, mentoring and peer lunch-mate programs.
- Schools can establish awards that honour pro-social behaviour (behaviour that is intended to help other people). Schools can also ensure that students are included in decision-making processes for setting rules and consequences.
BULLYING IN NOVA SCOTIA

STUDENTS WHO ARE BEING BULLIED

Bullying is a form of abuse at the hands of peers that takes different forms at different ages. Bullying is often an aggressive behaviour imposed from a position of power, which is repeated over time. With each repeated bullying incident, the student who is bullying increases in power while the student being victimized loses power. In Nova Scotia, 38% of students reported being bullied by other students in the last month, compared to 36% of students in Canada (2014/2015 CSTADS). Note: Bullying rates may be higher in 2014 due to the addition of “non-verbal” attacks as a form of bullying.

How Students Report Being Bullied

In Nova Scotia, non-verbal attacks are the most common form of bullying. The table to the right displays the forms of bullying reported by Nova Scotia students. Non-verbal attacks are also the most common form of bullying reported by all Canadian students who were bullied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOST COMMON FORMS OF BULLYING IN NOVA SCOTIA</th>
<th>% of students who reported being bullied by others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Non-verbal attacks (being ignored, being left out or excluded, being given dirty looks...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Verbal attacks (getting teased, threatened, or having rumours spread about you...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Cyber attacks (being sent mean text messages or having rumours spread about you on the internet...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Had someone steal from you or damage your things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Physical attacks (getting beaten up, pushed, or kicked...)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDENTS WHO BULLY OTHERS

Research shows that bullies and the victims of bullying report the highest levels of substance use. In Nova Scotia, 17% of students report bullying others in the last month. The graph to the right displays the percentage of students in Nova Scotia who bully others, in comparison to the rest of Canada and data from 2012 YSS in Nova Scotia. Note: Bullying rates may be higher in 2014 due to the addition of “non-verbal” attacks as a form of bullying.

How Students Report Bullying Others

In Nova Scotia, bullies report non-verbal attacks as the most common way they bully others. The table to the right displays the most common form of bullying, as reported by students who report bullying others in Nova Scotia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOST COMMON FORMS OF BULLYING IN NOVA SCOTIA</th>
<th>% of students who reported bullying others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11%   Non-verbal attacks (ignoring, leaving someone out or excluding them, giving dirty looks...)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%    Verbal attacks (teased, threatened, or having rumours spread about them...)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%    Physical attacks (beat up, pushed, or kicked them...)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%    Cyber attacks (sent mean text messages or spread rumours about them on the internet...)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%‡   Stole from them or damaged their things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools Can Provide Safe Environments and Address Bullying

Many organizations are dedicated to ensuring that children grow up in safe and secure school environments. These groups recognize that the issue of student violence is a societal problem; schools cannot resolve it on their own. Shared responsibility is fundamental to the achievement of safe learning environments. Schools in Nova Scotia may well be addressing bullying already. Here are ideas that schools may add to their kits:

- Teach students how to identify bullying, particularly attacks that are non-physical.
- Enable students to report bullying anonymously on the school website or other means.
- Train school staff to recognize target behaviour as it emerges so that intervention occurs early and works to prevent anti-social behaviour from escalating.
- Provide whole classroom consequences when bullying occurs. For example, remove a classroom ‘peace banner’ (a student created emblem of the classroom agreement), to communicate that bullying is everyone’s issue.
- Ask community youth workers to run restorative justice programs when incidents occur.
SMOKING IN NOVA SCOTIA

In Nova Scotia, 21% of students (21% of males and 20% of females) report ever having tried a cigarette, even a few puffs. The graph below compares Nova Scotia to the 2014/2015 CSTADS national results and the 2013/2013 YSS Nova Scotia results. While rates of use have slowly declined over time, many students remain at risk to experimenting and starting new habits. The next page reports on the susceptibility of students to start smoking.

STUDENTS WHO REPORT
EVER TRYING A CIGARETTE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>NS 2014 CSTADS</th>
<th>NS 2012 YSS</th>
<th>Canada 2014 CSTADS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5†</td>
<td>7‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7†</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15‡</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23†</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OBTAINING AND SHARING CIGARETTES

Smoking is a social activity and as a result, students often obtain their cigarettes from social sources in addition to retail outlets. In Nova Scotia:

- **34%** of students who are smoking report being *given cigarettes* by someone else.
- **29%** of students who are smoking report *buying cigarettes from a store*.
Most established smokers began experimenting with cigarettes between the ages of 10 and 18. Some students become nicotine dependent within a day of first inhaling cigarette smoke. People who become dependent can find it very difficult to quit. Therefore, we need to intervene before students become dependent.

In Nova Scotia, 31% of students who have never smoked a cigarette have low confidence in their ability to remain smoke-free in the future. These students are at high risk to begin smoking.

Students in Nova Scotia were asked the following questions:

- Do you think in the future you might try smoking cigarettes?
- At any time during the next year do you think you will smoke a cigarette?
- If one of your best friends were to offer you a cigarette, would you smoke it?

The graph displays the percentage of students who answered “Yes” to any of the above questions. Rates of susceptibility typically decline with increased grade, because more students have smoked.

Did You Know?

Students are less likely to begin smoking in the future if they have made a firm decision not to try smoking and if they have the resources to resist pressures to start.
TRENDS IN TOBACCO USE IN NOVA SCOTIA

Students use tobacco products other than cigarettes including: cigarillos, little cigars, cigars, e-cigarettes, water-pipes, and smokeless tobacco (i.e. chewing tobacco). The growing popularity of these products is concerning because students commonly misconceive alternate forms of tobacco as not being as bad for them as cigarettes. Research shows that these alternative forms of tobacco may be worse than cigarettes in some cases\textsuperscript{14,15}.

In Canada, 18% of Canadian students have tried cigarettes, and another 5% have not tried cigarettes but have tried “other” tobacco products (2014/2015 CSTADS). The following graph displays the number of students from Nova Scotia who have ever tried products as compared to the 2014/2015 CSTADS Canadian results and the 2012/2013 YSS Nova Scotia results.

ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (E-CIGARETTES, VAPES, PENS)

The jury is still out on e-cigarettes. While some argue it is a way to reduce harm, e-cigarettes may promote continuation of an addiction in adults, or promote trying nicotine products in students. In Nova Scotia, 8\% of students report having used e-cigarettes in the last 30 days (2014/2015 CSTADS). It is also interesting to note that 24\% of Nova Scotia students who have tried both report trying e-cigarettes before trying cigarettes.
Flavoured tobacco has appeal among students: they perceive them as less risky, and perceive the smoke as causing less irritation. Several provinces are working to strengthen legislation that bans adding flavours to tobacco products, since availability of flavoured tobacco may be stalling progress in decreasing tobacco initiation and use among Canadian youth. The graph below shows the percentage of students who used flavoured products among those that have used tobacco products in the last month. The current Nova Scotia results are compared to the 2014/2015 CSTADS national results and 2012/2013 YSS Nova Scotia results.

**FLAVOURED PRODUCT USE IN THE LAST MONTH**

(of students who use tobacco products)

* Flavoured products include flavoured cigarettes, cigarillos, cigars and water-pipe. 2014/2015 CSTADS also includes flavoured smokeless tobacco.

§ In 2014/2015 CSTADS the format of the questions changed from a mark all that apply to a series of yes/no.

**Schools Can Help Keep Students from Smoking**

Even when smoking rates are low, efforts need to focus on preventing susceptible students from experimenting with smoking. Schools can support established smokers and those experimenting with using tobacco products in the following ways:

- Brainstorm with students and staff about ways to re-purpose areas students use for smoking (both on and off school property) for more positive uses. Collaborate with the community to make changes feasible.
- Make sure students are aware that all tobacco products (e.g., cigarillos, little cigars, cigars, smokeless tobacco [snuff] and flavoured tobacco) have the same level of health risk. E-cigarettes also have risk.
- Use persuasive writing development or civics lessons to write to persuade local merchants and their staff to not sell or promote tobacco products to youth. Flavoured tobacco products are often targeted at youth. Engage local public health for support.
SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE IN NOVA SCOTIA

In Nova Scotia, students in grades 7 and above were asked about marijuana and alcohol use. It is startling to note the young age at which students first engage in these risky behaviours. Besides being illegal, students are making decisions to engage in these behaviours before they are developmentally capable of fully understanding the consequences. The table below shows the average age at which grade 12 students in Nova Scotia reported having first tried alcohol and marijuana.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSTANCE</th>
<th>AVERAGE AGE OF FIRST USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVER USED OR TRIED MARIJUANA</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAVING A DRINK OF ALCOHOL THAT WAS MORE THAN A SIP</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAVING 5 OR MORE DRINKS OF ALCOHOL ON ONE OCCASION</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MARIJUANA USE

In Nova Scotia, 28% of students reported having tried marijuana (29% of males, 27% of females). Comparatively, 22% of Canadian students reported having tried marijuana (22% of males, 21% of females).

Frequency of use

The social acceptance of marijuana has increased over time. The graph to the right displays the frequency of marijuana use among Nova Scotia students who reported using marijuana in the past 12 months. The graph also compares the current results to the national 2014 CSTADS results and the 2012 YSS results.

Schools Can Help Prevent Marijuana Use

- Schools can create class projects (e.g., in health class, or English class) that explore the long-term and short-term health risks of and social influences on marijuana use. Among youth, immediate social influences (rather than health) are more likely to motivate behaviour.
- Schools can ask community resource people (former drug user, clinician) to paint a picture of drug use consequences. Ensure that there are options to deal with issues that surface for students later. Do not rely only on testimonials for long-term culture change.
- Schools can equip students with skills to recognize and avoid situations where they may feel obligated to use marijuana. Where students cannot avoid it (e.g., if a joint is passed to them at a party), they should commit in advance to a friend not to use marijuana.
- Schools can have a “student success” teacher identify habitual users and then arrange to offer special programming for them during the school day.
ALCOHOL USE

In Nova Scotia, 41% of students reported having a drink of alcohol that was more than just a sip in the last 12 months. Of those who had more than just a sip of alcohol in the last 12 months, 67% report having 5 drinks or more on one occasion (binge drinking).

Frequency of use

In Nova Scotia, 24% of students reported consuming alcohol at least once a month in the last 12 months. Students who reported using alcohol were also asked how often they engaged in this behaviour. The graph to the right shows the reported frequency of alcohol use in the last 12 months, among the students in Nova Scotia schools who report using alcohol. These results are compared to the 2012 YSS results and the national 2014 CSTADS results.

Trends in Alcohol Use and Binge Drinking

Binge drinking is defined as drinking five or more drinks on a single occasion and it is the most common pattern of consumption among students who drink alcohol18. In Nova Scotia, 14% of students reported binge drinking at least once a month in the past year. These students need support.

Binge drinking at this age may hinder important developmental changes. The potential for serious and unpredictable consequences are well known.

Did You Know?

Tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use are strongly related. Of students who smoked in the last 30 days, 93% drank alcohol and 77% used marijuana in the past 12 months. Among non-smokers, only 36% and 12% used these substances in the last year respectively (2014/2015 CSTADS).
Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages

Caffeinated alcoholic beverages are drinks that contain both alcohol and caffeine. In Nova Scotia, 19% of students have consumed an energy drink (e.g., such as Rockstar™ and Red Bull™) with alcohol.

Consuming energy drinks (i.e., Red Bull™) in combination with alcohol is common among Canadian students. The caffeine in the energy drinks keeps the consumer awake and able to party for a longer period of time. In the 2014/2015 CSTADS, 34% of grades 7-12 students who reported drinking alcohol in the last 12 months also reported consuming an energy drink on the same occasion as drinking alcohol.

Did You Know?

People who consume alcohol mixed with energy drinks are:

- 3 times as likely to binge drink compared to people who do not mix their alcohol with energy drinks.\(^1^9\)
- 2 times more likely to report being taken advantage of sexually or to report taking advantage of someone else sexually when compared to drinkers who do not report mixing their alcohol with energy drinks.\(^2^0\)
- 2 times more likely to report riding with a driver who is impaired by alcohol when compared to drinkers who do not mix their alcohol with energy drinks.\(^2^0\)

Schools Can Take Action to Prevent Alcohol Abuse

- Schools can aim to have staff connected to student life so they are aware of and comfortable to address events (May 24, prom) that typically involve binge drinking so that students have thought of strategies to minimize risk.
- Schools can provide students with the opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of using binge drinking to put people at ease in social situations. Then schools can have students brainstorm heathier ways to have fun on weekends.
- Schools can have students work with local/provincial advocacy groups to identify how to put the issue of energy drinks and pre-mixed caffeinated alcoholic beverages in the government’s eye. For instance, promote more prominent warnings about the risks.
- Schools can ban energy drinks from school property.
- Schools can find ways to address common beliefs that can lead to alcohol abuse (e.g., “everyone does it” and “YOLO [you only live once]”).
HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOUR IN VEHICLES

EXPOSURE TO SECOND HAND SMOKE AND IMPAIRED OR HIGH DRIVING

Evidence shows that children are particularly vulnerable to the adverse health impacts associated with exposure to second-hand smoke. Across Canada, all provinces have legislated a ban on smoking tobacco in cars when children are present. Nationally, 26% of students reported riding in a vehicle with someone who was smoking in the past month (2014/2015 CSTADS). In Nova Scotia, 29% of students reported being exposed to second hand smoke in a vehicle in the last 30 days.

According to the 2014/2015 CSTADS, 33% of Canadian students in grades 7-12 reported riding in a vehicle with someone who had been consuming alcohol and 15% reported riding in a vehicle with a driver who had used marijuana. Unfortunately, many young people and some adults have the misperception that driving while high on cannabis is safer than driving under the influence of alcohol. The following graph shows the percentage of students in Nova Scotia who were at risk in a vehicle with someone who was smoking, or had been drinking alcohol or using marijuana.

**EXPOSURE TO HEALTH RISKS IN A VEHICLE**

Did You Know?

The 2014/2015 CSTADS revealed that 6% of Canadian students in grades 7-12 have driven a vehicle (e.g., car, snowmobile, motorboat or ATV) after drinking alcohol and 5% have driven a vehicle while under the influence of marijuana.
REFERENCES


