

# Utah 2023 SHARP Survey

## Results Snapshot

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Utah  
Prevention  
Network



Utah Department of  
Health & Human  
Services

The Utah Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Survey measures a variety of substance use and health related behaviors among Utah's youth population, providing critical information about the health and wellness of Utah's youth to state and local level substance abuse prevention & health promotion professionals, school district staff, and community prevention coalitions. The SHARP Survey is administered every other year on odd numbered years to youth in grades 6, 8, 10 & 12, and typically samples between 45,000-90,000 youth. The 2023 SHARP Survey was the 11th administration, marking an impressive milestone of 20 years since the first SHARP Survey in Utah. This data brief provides a snapshot of the results from the 2023 survey regarding trends in substance use and mental health, as well as highlighting data examining youth sleep, screen time, and social isolation. Future data briefs will provide a more in depth look at data on several of these topics, including: underage drinking, e-cigarettes and vaping, marijuana use, and mental health indicators such as treatment need, depression, and suicidal ideation and attempts.

### Utah youth substance use trends

The SHARP Survey collects both lifetime use (any use during your lifetime) and past 30-day use (any use in the 30 days preceding the survey) data across a variety of substance types. **Figure 1** presents past 30-day trend data for a selected set of substance use prevention priorities identified by the Utah Office of Substance Use and Mental Health (OSUMH), including: alcohol, marijuana, e-cigarettes/vaping, and (non-medical use of) prescription drugs<sup>1</sup>. Overall, youth substance use rates have been trending favorably (decreasing) in Utah over time. This is particularly true for alcohol (including binge drinking), traditional cigarettes, and prescription drug use. For example, between 2005 and 2023, 30-day alcohol use rates for youth in grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 decreased from 11.9% to 3.4% (a decrease of over 71%). Over a similar timeframe, rates of any non-medical prescription drug use decreased by half (from 3.3% to 1.5% in 2009 and 2023, respectively).

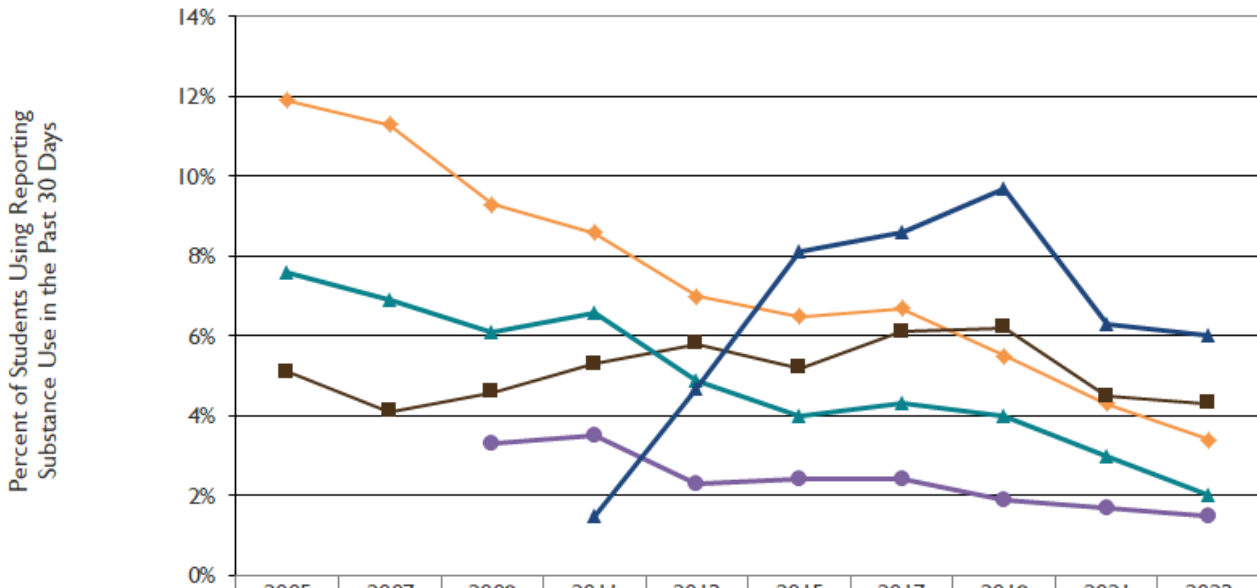
As with any general rule, there are exceptions to the overall decreasing youth substance use rates, specifically, in regards to marijuana use & vaping/e-cigarette use. Youth past 30-day marijuana use rates have fluctuated over the years, increasing between 2007 and 2019, then decreasing from 2019 to 2023. The recent decrease observed in youth marijuana use is encouraging given that medical marijuana use became legal in Utah in 2018, and "adult" (recreational) marijuana use is now legal in almost half of the states in the U.S. (including four of the six states that border Utah). The impact of the legalization of medical and "adult" use is apparent when examining Utah adult marijuana use rates (18 years and older), which have increased substantially in recent years<sup>2</sup> (from 6.3% to 9.8% from 2018 to 2021, respectively). The fact that youth marijuana use rates have not increased speaks to the effectiveness of prevention work being implemented throughout the state. E-cigarettes/vape devices made their initial appearance in the U.S. in 2007, and began gaining popularity a few years later. An item

<sup>1</sup> Non-medical prescription drug use includes any use of: prescription narcotics (pain relievers), sedatives, tranquilizers, and/or stimulants ("without a doctor telling you to take them").

<sup>2</sup> Utah past month marijuana use rates obtained from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

to measure e-cigarette use was added to the SHARP Survey in 2011, which proved to be timely. E-cigarette use among Utah youth increased at a dramatic pace from 2011 to 2015. During this time, prevention and health promotion efforts were ramped up to address this epidemic. Increases in vaping began to level out somewhat after 2015, and eventually showed a decrease between 2019 and 2021. A sharp drop in use was observed in 2021, followed by a more modest decrease in 2023, illustrating the importance of prevention efforts to decrease youth vaping.

**Figure 1. Youth Priority 30 Day Substance Use Trends in Utah: Grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 Combined (2005-2023)**



	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023
Alcohol	11.9%	11.3%	9.3%	8.6%	7.0%	6.5%	6.7%	5.5%	4.3%	3.4%
Marijuana	5.1%	4.1%	4.6%	5.3%	5.8%	5.2%	6.1%	6.2%	4.5%	4.3%
Binge Drinking (Past 2 Weeks)	7.6%	6.9%	6.1%	6.6%	4.9%	4.0%	4.3%	4.0%	3.0%	2.0%
Any Prescription Drug Misuse			3.3%	3.5%	2.3%	2.4%	2.4%	1.9%	1.7%	1.5%
Any E-Cigarette/Vape Use				1.5%	4.7%	8.1%	8.6%	9.7%	6.3%	6.0%

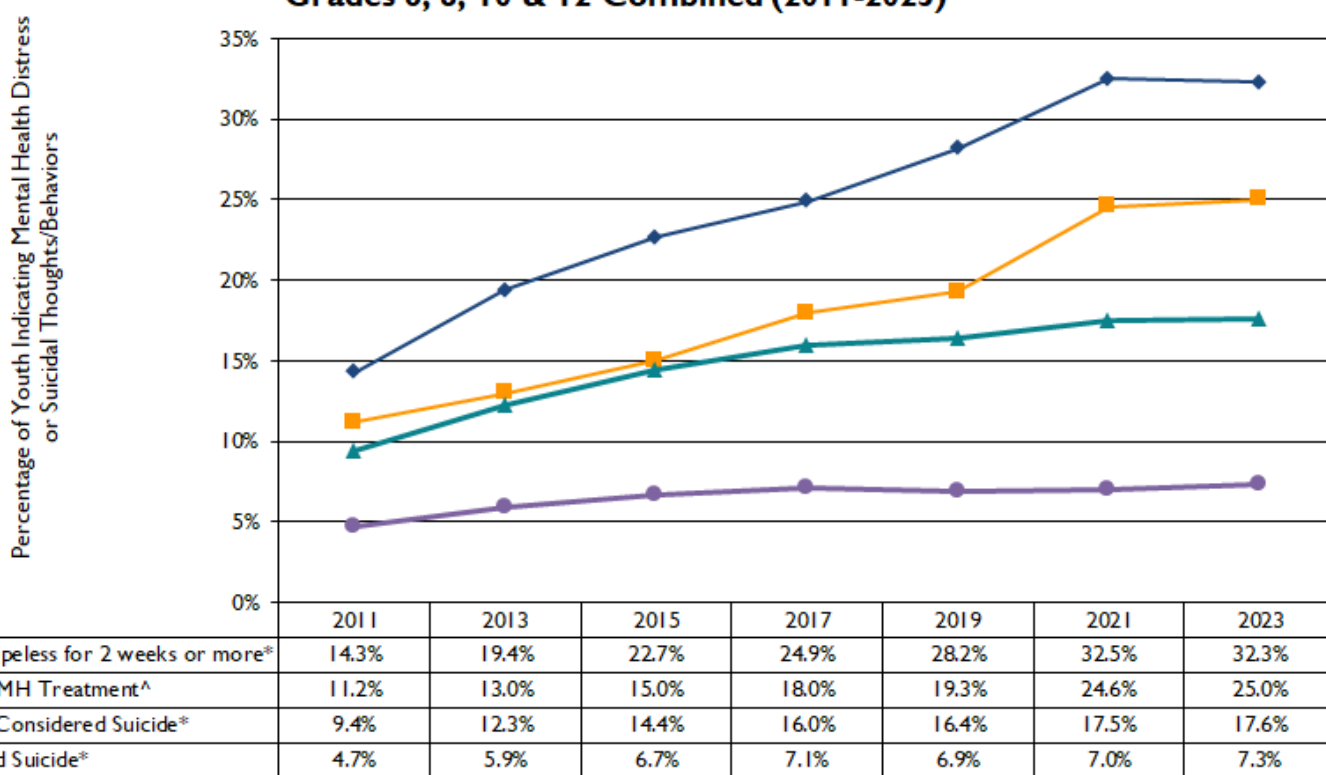
**Utah mental health and suicidal ideation trends**

The SHARP Survey collects a variety of data that provides insight into the mental health status of, as well as suicidal ideation and attempts among, Utah youth. Most of these measures were added to the SHARP Survey in 2011, providing trend data for over a decade. **Figure 2** presents trend data from a selected set of the mental health and suicide variables, including the percentage of youth who: were categorized as being in need for mental health treatment, felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row, seriously considered suicide, and made a suicide attempt<sup>3</sup>. While the trends for youth substance use have been quite favorable overall, the same cannot be said for the trends regarding mental health distress and suicide, which have been consistently

<sup>3</sup> Note: The need for mental health treatment measure is based on a past month time frame, while the other measures are based on a past year time frame.

trending upward since 2011. Rates of distress and suicidal ideation tend to increase with age, peaking in the 10th and 12th grades. However, worsening trends are seen across all grades included in the SHARP (6, 8, 10 & 12). There were substantial increases across the four indicators highlighted in **Figure 2**, with the rate for each of the indicators doubling or nearly doubling from 2011 to 2021. However, the 2023 data provided a basis for optimism, as there was little to no increase observed for any of these indicators from 2021 to 2023. Future SHARP data will be needed to confirm whether this reprieve proves to be a turning point towards decreasing trends, or a temporary pause. Regardless, these data shine a spotlight on the importance of ensuring that resources to address youth mental health are available across the state.

**Figure 2. Youth Mental Health & Suicide Indicator Trends: Grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 Combined (2011-2023)**



^In the past month

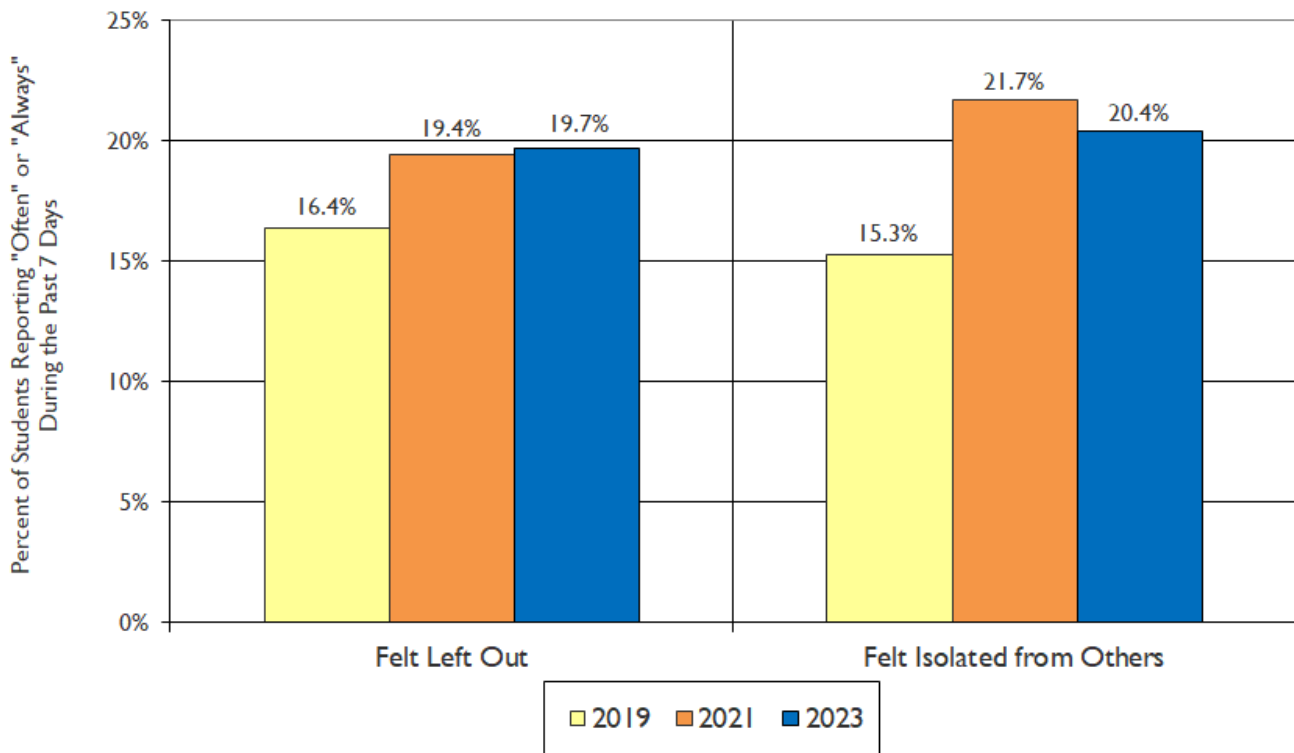
\*In the past year

### Social isolation data

Prior to the pandemic, prevention and health promotion professionals were concerned that a growing number of youth were becoming socially isolated, and about the impact of isolation on mental health, suicide, and substance use outcomes. These concerns became even more elevated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when public health measures intended to slow the transmission of the COVID-19 virus disrupted social behaviors and patterns. Items measuring social isolation were added to the SHARP Survey in 2019, providing a baseline measure of isolation prior to the pandemic. **Figure 3** presents the percentage of Utah youth who indicated “often” or “always” to two social isolation measures on the SHARP. In 2019, approximately 15% of

youth indicated they *often* or *always* “felt left out,” and “felt isolated from others” in the 7 days preceding the survey. Those percentages increased after the pandemic, in 2021, for both items (rates in 2023 remained elevated). Based on SHARP data, we know that Individuals who indicate feeling isolated are also more likely to report a variety of negative outcomes, including: use of alcohol and other substances, mental health distress, and suicidal ideation & attempts. Given that approximately one in five youth now feel socially isolated, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing connectedness should be important goals for health promotion professionals, school staff, and the general community.

**Figure 3. Youth Reporting Social Isolation Trend Data:  
Grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 Combined (2019-2023)**

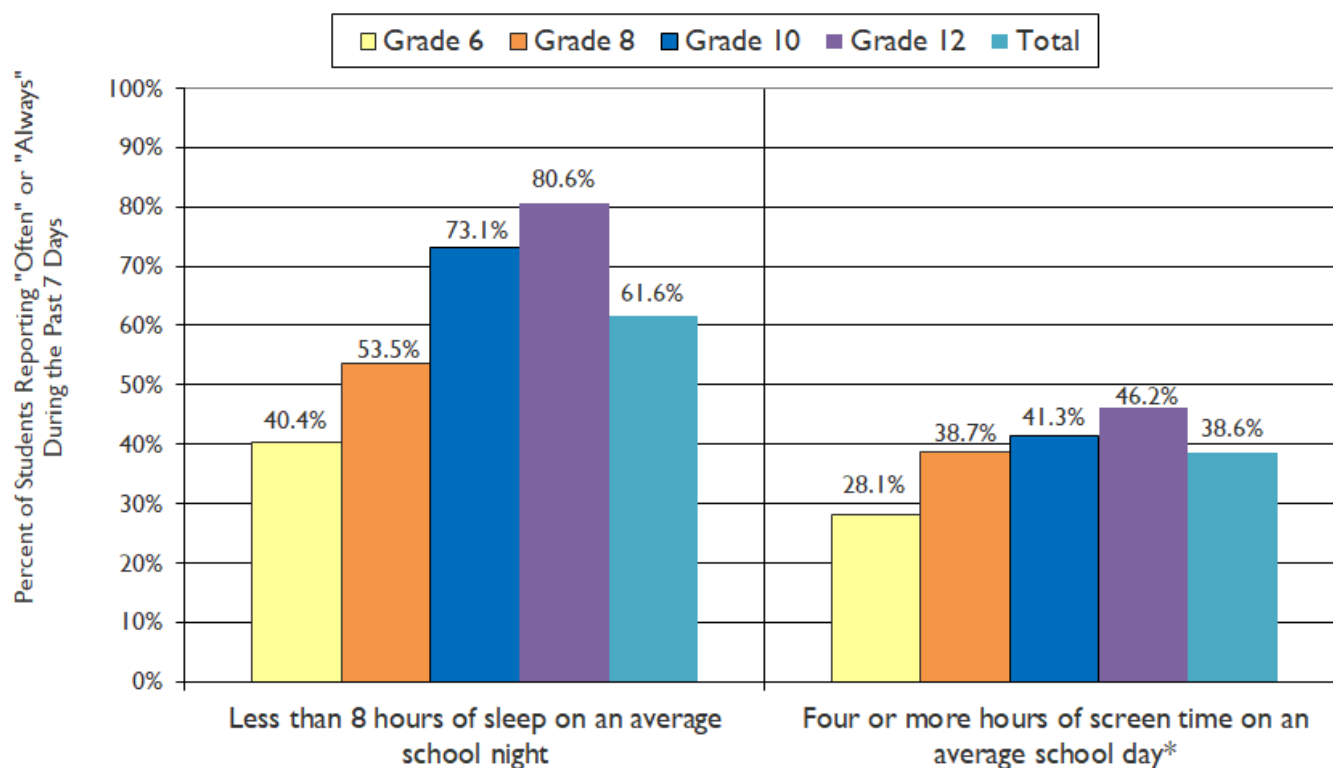


### Sleep and screen time data

Lastly, this data brief highlights data provided by the SHARP Survey in regards to youth sleep and screen time. In our ever increasingly busy and digitally based world, there has been increasing interest about how sleep and screen time are related to the mental and physical health of youth. Items to measure both of these variables have been added to the SHARP Survey in recent years. Analyses of SHARP Survey data have revealed a relationship between a variety of substance use and mental health variables and sleep, where less hours of sleep on a typical night predict a greater likelihood of substance use, mental health issues, and suicidal ideation. Similar relationships have been found for high levels of screen time. **Figure 4** presents a summary of the sleep and screen time data from the 2023 SHARP. Based on the data, it is clear that many youth are getting a less than

optimal amount of sleep on a typical school night. This is particularly true for older youth, with less than 30% of 10th graders, and less than 20% of 12th graders indicating they get 8 hours of sleep on a typical night. When it comes to screen time, a large proportion of youth in all grades indicated four or more hours of non-school work related screen time per day on a typical school day. Screen time also increased as a function of age, with only 28% of 6th graders indicating 4+ hours of screen time per day, but almost 40% of 8th graders, and over 40% of 10th and 12th graders indicating 4+ hours of daily screen time.

**Figure 4. Youth Sleep and Screen Time by Grade (2023)**



\*Electronic device screen time for something that is not school work (e.g., Xbox, Playstation, texting, YouTube, Instagram Facebook, or other social media)

This data brief was prepared for the Utah State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup by Bach Harrison, LLC. To learn more about prevention efforts to reduce substance abuse and misuse, visit <https://utahprevention.org/>.