Alcohol and Other Substance Use in the MetroWest Region (Grades 7-12)
Highlights from the 2014 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

Adolescent substance use - including the use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and misuse of prescription drugs - has been a serious concern in the MetroWest region for many years. While there have been substantial decreases in adolescent drinking in the region in the last decade, many youth still experiment with alcohol and engage in high-risk drinking. Use of marijuana also remains prevalent, and concern about the use of opioids in Massachusetts has risen sharply in recent years. Since 2006, the *MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey* (MWAHS) has collected information on alcohol and substance use across the MetroWest region. The MWAHS was most recently administered in Fall 2014 to 12,191 students at the middle school level in grades 7-8 (93% participation rate) and 24,355 students at the high school level in grades 9-12 (89% participation rate).

How many youth use substances?

Alcohol
- 11% of middle school youth and 54% of high school youth have had a drink of alcohol in their lifetime.*
- 4% of middle school youth and 33% of high school youth have used alcohol recently (in the past 30 days).
- 18% of high school youth report binge drinking (having five or more drinks in a row in the past 30 days).

Marijuana
- 3% of middle school youth and 30% of high school youth have used marijuana in their lifetime.
- 20% of high school youth have used marijuana in the past 30 days.

Prescription drug misuse and opioid use
- 1% of middle school youth and 7% of high school youth have misused prescription drugs in their lifetime, without a doctor's prescription. *This includes misuse of opioids (e.g., OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin) and non-opioids (e.g., Adderall, Ritalin, Xanax).*
- 4% of high school students have misused prescription drugs in the past 30 days.
- Lifetime use of the opioid, heroin, is reported by 2% of high school students.

When do adolescents start using substances?

Middle school
- In middle school, lifetime use of alcohol doubles from 7% in 7th grade to 15% in 8th grade. Lifetime use of marijuana increases from 1% to 5% during the middle school years.

High school
- From 9th to 12th grade, lifetime drinking increases from 33% to 72%, and lifetime marijuana use increases from 12% to 48%. By 12th grade, 50% of students have used alcohol and 33% have used marijuana in the past 30 days.
- Lifetime prescription drug misuse increases from 3% in 9th grade to 12% in 12th grade.

How do patterns of substance use differ among girls and boys?

Gender
- In middle school, lifetime drinking is lower among girls than boys (9% vs. 13%), but current drinking is reported by 4% of both girls and boys. In high school, reports of alcohol use are slightly higher among girls than boys, both for lifetime use (55% vs. 52%) and recent use (34% vs. 31%).
- Lifetime marijuana use is higher among boys than girls both in middle school (4% vs. 2%) and high school (33% vs. 28%).
- Lifetime prescription drug misuse is slightly higher among boys than girls (8% vs. 6%) in high school.

How is substance use associated with mental health?**

Depressive symptoms
- Students who use substances are more likely to report depressive symptoms. For example, in high school, lifetime drinkers are far more likely than nondrinkers to report depressive symptoms in the past 12 months (28% vs. 15%. Depressive symptoms are also more common among youth who have used marijuana (33% vs. 17%) and misused prescription drugs in their lifetime (46% vs. 20%) compared with nonusers.

Suicidality
- Suicidality is also associated with substance use. High school students who have used alcohol in the past 30 days are more likely than nondrinkers to report seriously considering suicide (18% vs. 10%) in the past 12 months. Reports of suicidal ideation are also more common among youth who used marijuana recently (22% vs. 11%) and youth who have misused prescription drugs in the past 30 days (35% vs. 12%) compared with nonusers.

* Does not include a few sips of wine for religious purposes. **The MWAHS data is cross-sectional, therefore, we cannot attribute causality to these associations.