

**Access to Risky
Products and
Perceptions of Risky
Behavior and Popularity**

**Findings from the Annenberg
National Risk Survey of Youth,
Ages 14 to 22**

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Rationale

At a major conference held at the University of Pennsylvania June 27 to 30, adolescent health researchers are discussing ways to design comprehensive interventions to reduce risky behavior in young people. Many adolescents engage in more than one risk behavior, such as use of tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs. However, our prevention programs tend to focus on one of these behaviors at a time. As new risks to adolescent health are identified, more time will be needed in schools and in media campaigns to address these risks. For example, although problem gambling has not been singled out as a risk to young people, increasing access to gambling venues (such as on the Internet and in convenience stores and casinos) may make young people increasingly susceptible to engaging in this behavior. However, if we can do a better job of helping young people to manage multiple risky behaviors, we may be able to better protect them from both known and new risks.

One factor that increases the opportunities for engaging in risky behavior is access to products that are illegal for minors to purchase. All of the behaviors we studied in this survey involve products that are restricted for sale to youth under the age of 18 (see table below). However, young people perceive that they can purchase these products anyway.

It has also been suggested that engaging in these behaviors can make a young person look cool despite the health warnings that they receive. As background for the meeting, we conducted the Annenberg National Risk Survey (ANRS) of 900 young people between the ages of 14 to 22. This survey determines rates of co-occurrence of several risky behaviors, access to products from which they are legally restricted, and perceptions of the extent to which popular peers engage in these behaviors.

Findings

QUESTION

Have you ever done any of the following:

- A. Smoked a cigarette, even one or two puffs?
- B. Smoked marijuana or hashish, even one or two puffs?
- C. Gambled for money, such as playing the lottery or other games of chance
- D. Had a drink of alcohol, such as beer, wine or liquor?

(If respondent says yes to any of the above, he or she is asked) Now I want to ask you about the last 30 days. In the last 30 days, have you:

- E. Smoked cigarettes of any kind?
- F. Smoked marijuana or hashish?
- G. Gambled for money, such as playing the lottery or other games of chance?
- H. Had a drink of alcohol, such as beer, wine or liquor?

Finding About half of young people who engage in any one risky behavior are also engaging in another, and this tendency increases with age. About one-third of young people ages 14 to 17 are engaging in at least one of four risky behaviors (in the past 30 days). Youth ages 18 to 22 are almost twice as likely to be engaging in at least one of four risky behaviors.

Table 1. Proportion of respondents saying that they have engaged in different numbers of four risky behaviors in past 30 days.

Number of Behaviors*	Ages 14 to 17 %	Ages 18 to 22 %	All %
At least one	32.6	63.3	48.8
At least two	13.6	35.6	25.4
At least three	4.5	15.2	10.2
All four	0.9	2.1	1.6

*Note: Behaviors include: smoking cigarettes, using marijuana, drinking alcohol, and gambling for money.

QUESTION

How far do you think you would have to go in the neighborhood where you live to buy the following items? Would you have to go a block or two, three to five blocks, five to ten blocks, or further to get _____?

- B. A lottery ticket
- C. A pack of cigarettes
- D. An alcoholic beverage
- E. An illegal drug, like marijuana

Finding: Major risks to health for young people are easily accessible. The majority of young people under age 18 say they can buy cigarettes, an alcoholic drink, or a lottery ticket within five blocks of their homes. One in three young people (37 percent) believe that even an illegal drug, such as marijuana, is available for purchase within a 5-block radius.

Table 2A. Distance from home to purchase cigarettes by age of respondent.

Distance in Blocks to Purchase	Age			
	14 to 17 %	18 to 20 %	21 to 22 %	Total %
1-5	69.9	78.7	76.2	74.1
1-2	49.5	59.9	53.1	53.8
3-5	20.4	18.8	23.1	20.3
5-10	12.0	10.2	10.6	11.1
10 or more	15.7	10.5	11.9	13.2
Don't know	2.3	0.6	1.3	1.6
# per column	426	314	160	900

Table 2C. Distance from home to purchase illegal drug such as marijuana by age of respondent.

Distance in	Age			
	14 to 17 %	18 to 20 %	21 to 22 %	Total %
1-5	35.9	41.8	32.6	37.3
1-2	24.2	32.2	23.8	26.9
3-5	11.7	9.6	8.8	10.4
5-10	12.7	11.5	7.5	11.3
10 or more	33.6	23.6	28.8	29.2
Don't Know	17.8	23.2	31.2	22.1
# per column	426	314	160	900

Table 2B. Distance from home to purchase alcohol by age of respondent.

Distance in Blocks to Purchase	Age			
	14 to 17 %	18 to 20 %	21 to 22 %	Total %
1-5	63.8	72.0	69.4	67.5
1-2	42.5	53.8	46.3	47.1
3-5	21.1	18.2	23.1	20.4
5-10	14.3	11.5	13.1	13.1
10 or more	19.0	15.6	16.3	17.3
Don't Know	3.1	1.0	1.3	2.0
# per column	426	314	160	900

Table 2D. Distance from home to purchase lottery ticket by age of respondent.

Distance in Blocks to Purchase	Age			
	14 to 17 %	18 to 20 %	21 to 22 %	Total %
1-5	59.4	68.5	62.6	63.1
1-2	39.2	51.0	41.3	43.7
3-5	20.2	17.5	21.3	19.4
5-10	12.9	10.5	10.6	11.7
10 or more	23.9	19.7	23.1	22.3
Don't Know	3.8	1.3	3.8	2.9
# per column	426	314	160	900

QUESTION

When you think of people your age who are popular, what is the first thought or image that comes to mind? Would you describe this image as very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad? Next, please think about popular young men (women) in comparison to men (women) who are not popular. Would the popular person be more likely, about as likely, or less likely than the unpopular person to _____?

- A. Smoke cigarettes
- B. Smoke marijuana occasionally
- C. Drink alcoholic beverages such as beer, wine or liquor occasionally
- D. Inhale fumes from gasoline, glue, paint solvents or other household products to get high
- E. Gamble often for money, such as by playing the lottery or other games of chance
- F. Have a gun
- G. Play competitive sports

Finding: Young people think that popular peers are just as likely or more likely than unpopular peers to smoke cigarettes, use marijuana, drink alcohol, or gamble for money. For many, these behaviors are seen as a sign of popularity. Patterns appear similar for both high school and college-age youth.

Table 3. Relation between Risky Behavior and Perception of Peer Popularity.

Behavior	Perceived Relation to Popularity Ages 14-17 and 18-22								
	Unpopular %			No Difference %			Popular %		
	14-17	18-22	Total	14-17	18-22	Total	14-17	18-22	Total
Cigarette Use	22.3	17.1	19.6	35.4	42.8	39.3	40.6	38.2	39.3
Marijuana Use	27.0	13.5	19.9	32.2	44.1	38.4	38.7	39.9	39.3
Alcohol Use	11.0	7.4	9.1	31.5	32.9	32.2	55.6	57.8	56.8
Gambling	28.9	23.2	25.9	34.5	42.0	38.4	32.4	29.5	30.9
Inhalant Use	45.3	42.2	43.7	31.0	34.0	32.6	19.2	18.1	18.7
Gun Ownership	45.3	41.1	43.1	33.1	37.6	35.4	17.1	15.6	16.3
Sports	9.6	13.1	11.4	18.1	17.9	18.0	71.4	67.1	69.1

Finding: Not only are popular peers seen as likely to engage in risky behaviors, but they are also very likely to be seen as engaging in more than one risky behavior. Nearly three-quarters of young people think that their popular peers are likely to engage in at least one of four risky behaviors (cigarettes, marijuana, alcohol, and gambling).

Table 4. Proportion of respondents that believe that their popular peers are likely to engage in different numbers of four risky behaviors.

Number of Behaviors*	Ages 14 to 17 %	Ages 18 to 22 %	All %
None	25.6	26.8	26.5
At least one	74.4	73.2	74.5
At least two	49.7	50.4	50.6
At least three	31.1	30.9	31.5
All four	12.0	10.8	11.4

*Note: Behaviors include: smoking cigarettes, using marijuana, drinking alcohol, and gambling for money.

QUESTION

In your opinion, is your _____ very risky for your health, somewhat risky, a little risky or not at all risky for your health?

- A. Smoking (If nonsmoker, then: if you were a smoker, would your smoking be)
- B. Smoking marijuana (If non-user, then: if you smoked marijuana, would your smoking be)
- C. Drinking alcohol (If non-drinker, then: if you were to drink alcohol, would your drinking be)
- D. Gambling for money (If non-gambler, then: if you gambled for money, would this be)

Finding: Perceptions of risk are not strongly related to perceptions of what popular peers do. Of those who think cigarette smoking is very risky to health, 40% view it as an activity that popular peers are likely to do, while of those who think it is only a little or not at all risky, 33% view it as popular. Of those who think marijuana use is very risky to health, 41% view it as a popular activity, but of those who think it is not risky, 37% view it as popular.

Table 5A. Cigarettes

Perceived Popularity of Peer	Perceived Risk of Cigarettes		
	Very (%)	Somewhat (%)	Only a Little/Not at All (%)
Unpopular	18.4	18.5	31.8
No Difference	39.8	40.1	34.1
Popular	40.0	39.5	32.9
Number per column	648	162	85

Table 5B. Marijuana

Perceived Popularity of Peer	Perceived Risk of Marijuana		
	Very (%)	Somewhat (%)	Only a Little/Not at All (%)
Unpopular	22.8	17.8	14.3
No Difference	34.2	41.6	47.2
Popular	40.5	38.4	36.6
Number per column	509	219	161

Table 5C. Alcohol.

Perceived Popularity of Peer	Perceived Risk of Alcohol		
	Very (%)	Somewhat (%)	Only a Little/Not at All (%)
Unpopular	11.2	6.0	8.5
No Difference	32.3	30.1	35.8
Popular	54.4	62.5	53.4
Number per column	421	299	176

Table 5D. Gambling.

Perceived Popularity of Peer	Perceived Risk of Gambling		
	Very (%)	Somewhat (%)	Only a Little/Not at All (%)
Unpopular	33.3	26.8	21.4
No Difference	27.8	37.6	44.2
Popular	33.3	31.0	30.2
Number per column	198	287	407

The Law

	State Laws	Federal Law
Tobacco	All states prohibit the sale of tobacco to minors. In most states minors are considered to be children under the age of 18. Alabama, Alaska and Utah consider minors to be individuals under the age of 19. Pennsylvania prohibits the sale of cigarettes and cigarette papers to anyone under the age of 21, but it only enforces the law for those under the age of 18.	Federal law prohibits sales to minors.
Alcohol	The states restrict the purchase of alcohol to persons 21 years of age and over.	
Lottery Tickets	The majority of states allow anyone 18 years of age and older to play the lottery. Nebraska's age limit is 19. The age limit in Louisiana and Iowa is 21. New York prohibits individuals under the age of 21 from playing, "Quick Draw," a game usually located in venues off limits to minors. Otherwise, the age limit in NY is 18.	There are no federal laws regulating the sale of lottery tickets to adolescents

Survey Methodology

The margin of error for the survey of 900 respondents is +/- 3.3%. The margin of error for the entire survey of 900 respondents is +/- 3.3%. The margin of error for breakdowns by age is +/- 4.8% and for gender is +/- 4.7%

The survey was conducted by telephone using random-digit dialing procedures between May 8th to June 23rd, 2002. Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc. of New York conducted the survey. All households in the continental US that have telephone service and that have a young person between the ages of 14 and 22 were eligible to participate in the survey. Youth under the age of 18 were only interviewed if a parent provided consent for the interview.