



For Immediate Release  
November 30, 2011

**Survey finds 41 percent of high school students have used one or more addictive substances within the past month**

Chattanooga, TN – In Hamilton County, 7 out of 10 high school students have used one or more addictive substances in their lifetime, according to the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the Hamilton County Regional Health Council.

- 63 percent have consumed alcohol
- 43 percent have smoked cigarettes
- 37 percent have used marijuana
- 5 percent have used cocaine

Within the past month, 41 percent of high school students have used one or more of these substances and are classified as current substance users. Alcohol is the most commonly used addictive substance, with one-third of high school students drinking within the past month, followed by marijuana, cigarettes, and cocaine.

"While challenges remain, we have seen some decreases in the use of addictive substances since 1998," said Rae Young Bond, executive director, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Medical Society and Medical Foundation of Chattanooga, and a member of the Regional Health Council. "The percentage of students who have ever tried one or more addictive substances decreased from 84 percent in 1998 to 71 percent in 2011," Bond noted.

The percentage of high school students who currently use one or more addictive substances decreased from 55 percent in 1998 to 41 percent in 2011. "However, current substance use increases with grade in school, rising from 29 percent of ninth graders to 52 percent of twelfth graders and is higher among male students (45 percent) than female students (38 percent)," said Bond.

- 43 percent of all students have ever tried smoking, but white students were more likely to continue
- 21 percent of white students were current smokers, compared to 8 percent of black students and 14 percent of Latino students

"We also know that substance use is significantly higher among smokers than non-smokers," said Kevin Lusk, chair of SmokeFree Chattanooga. Compared with non-smokers, current smokers are:

- 3.5 times more likely to drink (77 percent vs. 22 percent)
- 5.5 times more likely to use marijuana (61 percent vs. 11 percent) and,
- 7.4 times more likely to have tried prescription drugs (52 percent vs. 7 percent)

(more)

#### Additional findings:

- One-third of students are current drinkers
- 18 percent of all students engage in binge drinking (having 5 or more drinks within a few hours)
- Binge drinking is highest among twelfth grade boys
- 26 percent of students used one or more tobacco products in the past 30 days
- Use of tobacco products, alcohol, and prescription drugs is highest among white students
- Black students were more likely to use marijuana (25 percent) than white (18 percent) or Latino (16 percent) students

For the first time, the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey included questions about prescription drug use. "This is a growing issue of concern," said Thomas P. Miller, MD, chair of the RHC Addictions and Dependency Committee. "Fifteen percent of students reported that they have ever used prescription drugs such as OxyContin, Percocet, Demerol, Adderall, Ritalin, or Xanax, without a prescription," said Dr. Miller. The majority of students get prescription drugs for free, usually from a friend or relative.

- 35 percent of students using prescription drugs most often said the drugs were given to them
- 23 percent purchased prescription drugs from a dealer
- 21 percent took them from a friend or relative
- White students were four times more likely to have used prescription drugs than black students, (20 percent compared to 5 percent)

"Research shows that the human brain continues to develop through the 20s," Bond said. "The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that one of the last areas to mature is the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain required for planning, judgment, impulse control and foreseeing consequences. Research suggests that since the teen brain is still developing, addictive substances may physically alter the structure and function of the teen brain faster and more intensely than adults, further impairing judgment and increasing the risk of addiction," said Bond.

To view this and other 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reports, visit our website at <http://health.hamiltontn.org/CHS/CommunityAssessmentPlanning.aspx>

#### **About the Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

A total of 3,492 high school students representing 19 public and 6 private schools in Hamilton County took the anonymous and voluntary survey. The response rate was 69.6 percent. This year marked the third YRBS; previous surveys were conducted in 1998 and 2001, with 2,990 and 2,752 completed surveys, respectively.

Funding for the survey was provided by the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department, the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, First Things First, OnPoint, Public Education Foundation, the Medical Foundation of Chattanooga, and Bea Lurie (Girls Inc.).

The Regional Health Council serves as the lead community-based organization designated by the Tennessee Department of Health and is responsible for community health assessment, regional health planning, and the provision of input regarding funding decisions for health and health related initiatives.

The Regional Health Council is hosting a series of briefings on different aspects of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Topics will focus on risky sexual behavior; alcohol, tobacco, and substance abuse; health and wellness; and youth violence, bullying, and weapon carrying.