

# Marijuana Use Among Juvenile Hall Youth at High: Study

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Marijuana use among youth booked into Juvenile Hall in San Diego County is at the highest rate seen in the past 14 years, according to a newly-released report from SANDAG.

The study, which included interviewing 136 youth at Juvenile Hall within 48 hours of their arrest and obtaining urine samples, found that more than half of the minors booked into the facility tested positive for pot – 53 percent, to be precise.

That figure is up 11 percent from 42 percent in 2000, SANDAG said.

According to the study, 90 percent of youth reported that they had tried marijuana. The average age of their first use of the drug was at 12 years old.

Two-thirds, or 62 percent, of those surveyed said pot was the first drug they had tried, up from 35 percent in 2009.

SANDAG said 88 percent of youth said it was “very easy” or “easy” to obtain marijuana. Meanwhile, only 16 percent of juvenile pot users said the use of the drug was “very bad” or “bad” for them, compared to 34 percent for alcohol and 58 percent for tobacco.

Of the youth who tested positive for marijuana, 58 percent said they had ridden in a car driven by someone under the influence, while 42 percent admitted they had gone to school drunk or high. The study said 41 percent said they had gotten into a physical fight while drunk or high.

SANDAG Criminal Justice Research Director Dr. Cynthia Burke said the results of the study indicate a rise in the popularity of marijuana among youth in the San Diego region.

"At the same time, there is a growing perception among young people that the drug does not pose significant risks," Burke added.

Last month, SANDAG released related research on the use of methamphetamine among youth booked in Juvenile Hall in San Diego County. That report found that 10 percent of youth booked into the local facility tested positive for meth in 2013. This was a significant increase after record lows of 4 percent in 2011 and 2012, though still far below the record high of 21 percent reported in 2005.