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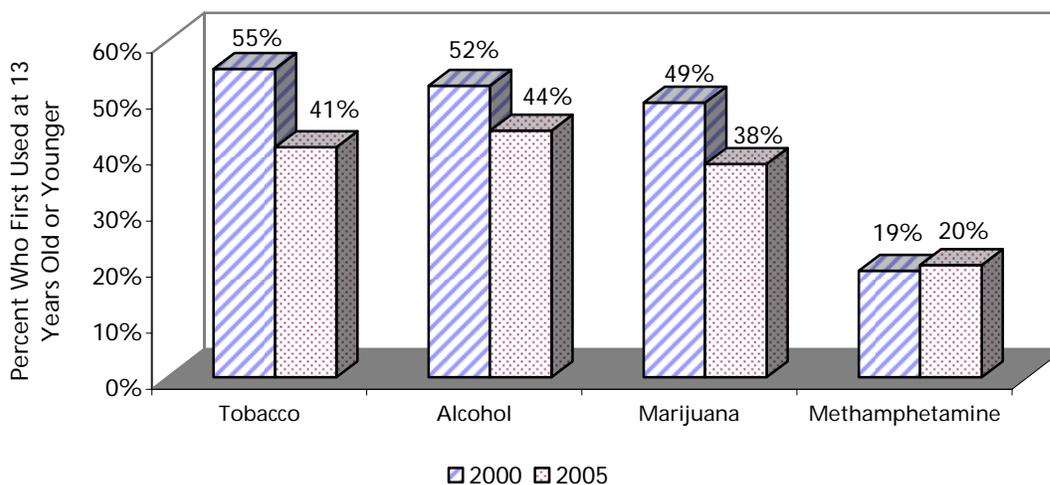
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## EARLY USE OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL DECREASES, BUT STILL PREVALENT AMONG SAN DIEGO YOUTH

Early use (before age 14) of a substance is a predictor of continued use and/or dependence, as well as future problem behaviors. Two sources for monitoring this risk factor in San Diego County are the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS),<sup>1</sup> which surveys high school youth in the City of San Diego and the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, which interviews juvenile arrestees in San Diego County.

Results from both studies in 2005 revealed that the percentage of youth reporting early use of substances has decreased over the years. Specifically, data from the YRBS show that 26 percent of San Diego High School youth reported drinking alcohol at or before age 13 in 2005, compared to 32 percent in 1999, tobacco use was down to 13 percent (compared to 18% in 1999) and 10 percent of youth reported marijuana use (down from 12% in 1999) (not shown). As Figure 1 shows, while the percentage of youth arrestees reporting early use has also decreased, a greater percentage than in the general school population reported starting experimenting with substances at a young age. In 2005, over one in three (38% to 44%) arrestees reported initiating tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use as a child or young teen. In addition, one in five youth reported early use of methamphetamine, which was a one percent increase during this same five-year period<sup>2</sup>. While preventions, such as the Life Skills Program implemented in San Diego City School District, could be contributing to this decrease in early use, the large proportion of arrestees still engaging in early use and the potential harmful consequences of this young initiation reinforces the need for effective prevention and early intervention efforts for this higher-risk population.

**Figure 1**  
**A HIGH PROPORTION OF JUVENILE ARRESTEES REPORT EARLY USE OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS**



SOURCE: SANDAG; *Juvenile Arrestees – CJ Bulletin June 2006: 2005 Juvenile Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region*

The current SAM bulletin, as well as past bulletins on both the adult and juvenile arrestee populations, can be found on the SANDAG's Web site at [www.sandag.org/cjc](http://www.sandag.org/cjc).

<sup>1</sup> Sponsored by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the YRBS is conducted in schools throughout the nation every two years.

<sup>2</sup> The YRBS does not include questions about methamphetamine use.