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Survey Shows Florida Overall Drug Use Down Among Youth

~ Inhalants, Over-The-Counter drugs, and Prescription Drugs Are Widely Abused ~

TALLAHASSEE - Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp today announced significant reductions in underage alcohol use and binge drinking, as he announced the results of the 2008 *Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey*. The Florida Office of Drug Control, state agencies, law enforcement, substance abuse prevention coalitions, schools and community stakeholders have partnered to reduce substance abuse across the state.

"Children are Florida's most vulnerable residents, and protecting them from the dangers of substance use is tremendously important," said Lt. Governor Kottkamp. "Drug use threatens the health and safety of our children and their families. The survey is vital to understanding how to prevent drug use."

According to the survey, which has been administered every year since 2000, drug use among Florida's middle and high school students is down in 10 out of 11 areas consistently measured over the history of the survey. From 2007 to 2008, among middle and high school students, past 30-day use of alcohol and binge drinking declined significantly. Long-term trends documented from 2000 to 2008 include:

- **Cigarette smoking is cut in half:** The past 30-day use of cigarettes among middle and high schoolers is at 9%, down from 18% in 2000.
- **Binge drinking declines by 14% since 2000:** Binge drinking, defined as having five or more drinks in a row in the past two weeks, currently stands at 15%, down from 19% in 2000.
- **Use of any illegal drug other than marijuana continues to decline.** The percent of students that report using any illegal drug other than marijuana has declined by 24% since 2000 and now stands at a historically low 6.6%.
- **Early initiation continues to decline:** Research confirms that if our youth make it to adulthood without experimenting with drugs, they are far less likely to start using later

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in life. The 2008 survey documents an important decline in the percentage of high school students that first used alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana before the age of 14.

- **New question on Over-The-Counter drugs:** For the first time, middle schoolers were asked about their use of Over-The-Counter drugs – such as cold and cough medications – in order to get high. The lifetime prevalence rate of Over-The-Counter drug abuse (4.9%) is higher than the rate for any illegal drug except marijuana.
- **Prescription drugs emerging as a dangerous source of abuse:** With the exception of marijuana, more high school seniors now report abusing prescription pain relievers (like Oxycontin and Vicodin) and prescription depressants (like Xanax and Valium) than any other illegal drugs.

"The 2008 report suggests major progress in reducing underage drinking," said Office of Drug Control Director Bill Janes. "Prevalence rates for the vast majority of drugs monitored by the FYSAS have been significantly reduced over the past eight years. This is a testament to the tremendous progress the state has made toward enhancing the prevention infrastructure in the areas of assessment, strategic planning, and implementation of evidence-based programs and policies. Our communities are making a real difference."

"While drug use is down overall, parents need to be acutely alert to the dangers posed by legally accessible substance like inhalants, alcohol, prescription drugs, and Over-The-Counter medications. Parents need to do their part to keep young people safe by restricting the availability of these substances within their homes and by closely monitoring their children's activities," Janes said.

Florida's Drug Control Strategy acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring that children, families, and communities are healthy and safe. Florida's diverse communities must prioritize their needs and select the most effective strategies that will be used to tackle their unique profile of substance abuse problems. This is why our continued support of community anti-drug coalitions is so vital to our prevention efforts. The dramatic progress the state has made in reducing youth alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use is a result of the ongoing expansion of our community-based efforts and the support of state agencies.

Florida's youth survey measures youth substance use annually across the state, and in alternate years, in each county. The 2008 edition included 91,471 valid returns from sixth through 12th graders in 66 out of Florida's 67 counties. The full report will soon be available online at www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/publications/fysas/.

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