

Smoking finally on the wane in Nova Scotia?

A mainstay vice of the teenage years — smoking — is becoming markedly less popular in Nova Scotia, the province's fourth annual drug use survey indicates.

The 2002 survey found that 23% of teenage students smoke cigarettes, a 13% drop from 1998, and the proportion of regular teen smokers — those who have more than 10 cigarettes a day — dipped to 4% from 7%. Overall, the percentage of students who did not use drugs in the past 12 months increased to 40% in 2002

Last call for print journals?

The University of Toronto library's decision to cancel print subscriptions for up to 300 journals in favour of online versions is shortsighted, a physics researcher and 20-year employee of the library's serials section says. "E-journals are less readable, less browsable and of uncertain shelf life," complains Matthew Edwards of the Gerstein Science Information Centre, the library serving all science and health science disciplines at the university.

Edwards told *CMAJ* that the e-journal archive may not be secure because it is unproven. "The possibility exists that sometime down the road chunks of the e-journal archive will become corrupted or lost, and not be replaceable."

The library began cancelling print subscriptions in 2001 after it became 10% to 15% cheaper to buy only their electronic versions. This year print versions of journals such as *Cancer*, the *Journal of Pediatrics* and the *Journal of Neurophysiology* will be cancelled.

Edwards laments the loss of the "art of research" as browsing through stacks becomes a thing of the past. "People should realize what they are losing," he says.

And science may be the ultimate loser. "Because e-journals are less browsable, researchers in the future may tend to concentrate on just a few core titles ... and this narrowing of perspective could have a negative impact on science," he warned in a letter to the *University of Toronto Bulletin*. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

from 35% in 1998. More than 4300 Nova Scotia students from grades 7, 9, 10 and 12 participated in the study last spring.

"We need to continue to support [youth] in making healthy choices and at the same time provide more support services to those who may experiment or have problems," said then Health Minister Jamie Muir. He attributed the marked decline in tobacco use to higher cigarette prices, smoke-free legislation, greater awareness of the harm smoking does and greater support for young people who want to quit — all components of Nova Scotia's antitobacco strategy.

Despite the decrease in smoking, Nova Scotia's rate is still slightly above the Canadian average. Nationwide, 22.5% of youth aged 15–19 smoked in 2001.

Dr. Christiane Poulin, principal investigator in the Nova Scotia survey and a professor in Dalhousie's Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, says the decrease in cigarette smoking is "very significant. However, the survey also shows that a fairly large percentage of teenagers is using substances in a manner that puts them at risk of harm — including driving while impaired. We need to help students reduce these high-risk behaviours."

The survey found that 26% of stu-



The Canadian Press

A disappearing breed?

dents reported driving within 1 hour of using cannabis. Of the 29% of students who reported having had sexual intercourse in the past year, 35% reported having unplanned sex while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. For the first time, the survey also measured the incidence of ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine) use, and found that 4% of students had used the popular street drug at least once in the past year. — *Donalee Moulton, Halifax*

Free fall in HIV/AIDS totals continues

Health Canada has released its latest HIV/AIDS surveillance report, and the news is mostly good. Not only has the number of positive HIV tests reported in 2001 declined by more than 27% since 1995, to 2180, but the free fall in the number of AIDS cases continues, from 1766 reported in 1993 to 297 in 2001 and just 75 during the first 6 months of 2002. Five jurisdictions — Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and the 3 territories — reported no new cases from January to June, 2002.

Dr. Philip Berger, medical director of the Inner City Health Program at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, says the decline "corresponds exactly" with the introduction of antiretroviral drugs and multidrug regimens in the 1990s.

But Berger, a family physician who has been treating AIDS patients for 20 years, also sounded a note of caution by pointing to the growing impact HIV/AIDS is having on girls and women. The surveillance report says females account for 14.7% of all positive HIV tests reported since 1985, but the proportion has increased from 11.4% between 1985 and 1996 to 26% in the first half of last year. Those infected also tend to be young, with girls and women aged 15 to 29 accounting for 42.6% of females who tested positive during the latter period.

The other major area of concern is within Canada's Aboriginal population. The latest data indicate that natives, who comprise less than 3% of the population, accounted for 14.1% of new AIDS cases during the latest reporting period, up from 1.4% between 1979 and 1992. — *Patrick Sullivan, CMAJ*