



Understanding Youth Gambling in Oregon: Patterns, Risks, and Prevention Opportunities

A Supplemental Report of the 2022 and 2024
Oregon Student Health Surveys

Prepared by Problem Gambling Solutions, Inc.

Acknowledgments

This report is based on a subset of data collected from the 2022 and 2024 Oregon Student Health Survey (SHS), a survey that is part of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). The YRBSS is a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and state health authorities. We would like to acknowledge those involved in the development and collection of Oregon's SHS data.

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Executive Summary

The supplemental report, "Understanding Youth Gambling in Oregon: Patterns, Risks, and Prevention Opportunities", analyzes data from the 2022 and 2024 Oregon Student Health Surveys (SHS) to examine youth gambling trends, associated risks, and prevention opportunities. The findings highlight a concerning rise in gambling participation among Oregon youth, with 23% of students reporting gambling in the past three months in 2024, up from 20% in 2022—a 14% increase. Gambling prevalence was highest among 8th graders, while 11th graders showed the largest increase in participation (18%). Boys/men were more than twice as likely to gamble compared to girls/women (31% vs. 15%), and online gambling saw the fastest growth, increasing by 58% between 2022 and 2024.

The report identifies strong associations between gambling and other risk behaviors. Youth who gambled were significantly more likely to report prescription drug misuse, alcohol consumption, marijuana use, illicit drug use, tobacco use, suicidal behavior, feelings of sadness or hopelessness and experience cyber bullying. Additionally, gambling was associated with shifts in future aspirations, with youth who gamble more likely to pursue vocational pathways (e.g., trade school, military service) rather than higher education.

The study highlights the growing prevalence of at-risk gambling behavior among 11th graders. From 2022 to 2024, the rate of 11th graders at risk for problem gambling rose by 20%, with 3.6% of 11th graders who reported gambling in the past 3-months scoring in the problem gambling range on a validated screening tool. 11th graders who scored at risk for problem gambling showed significantly higher rates of risky behaviors, including prescription drug misuse, illicit drug use, being bullied, and suicide attempts.

The findings highlight that youth gambling is becoming more normalized and accessible, especially online. Gambling is closely linked to a broader pattern of risk-taking and emotional vulnerability, suggesting the need for integrated prevention strategies that address gambling alongside substance use, mental health, and other risky behaviors. Early intervention is crucial, as greater gambling involvement is associated with more serious harm.

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Youth Gambling

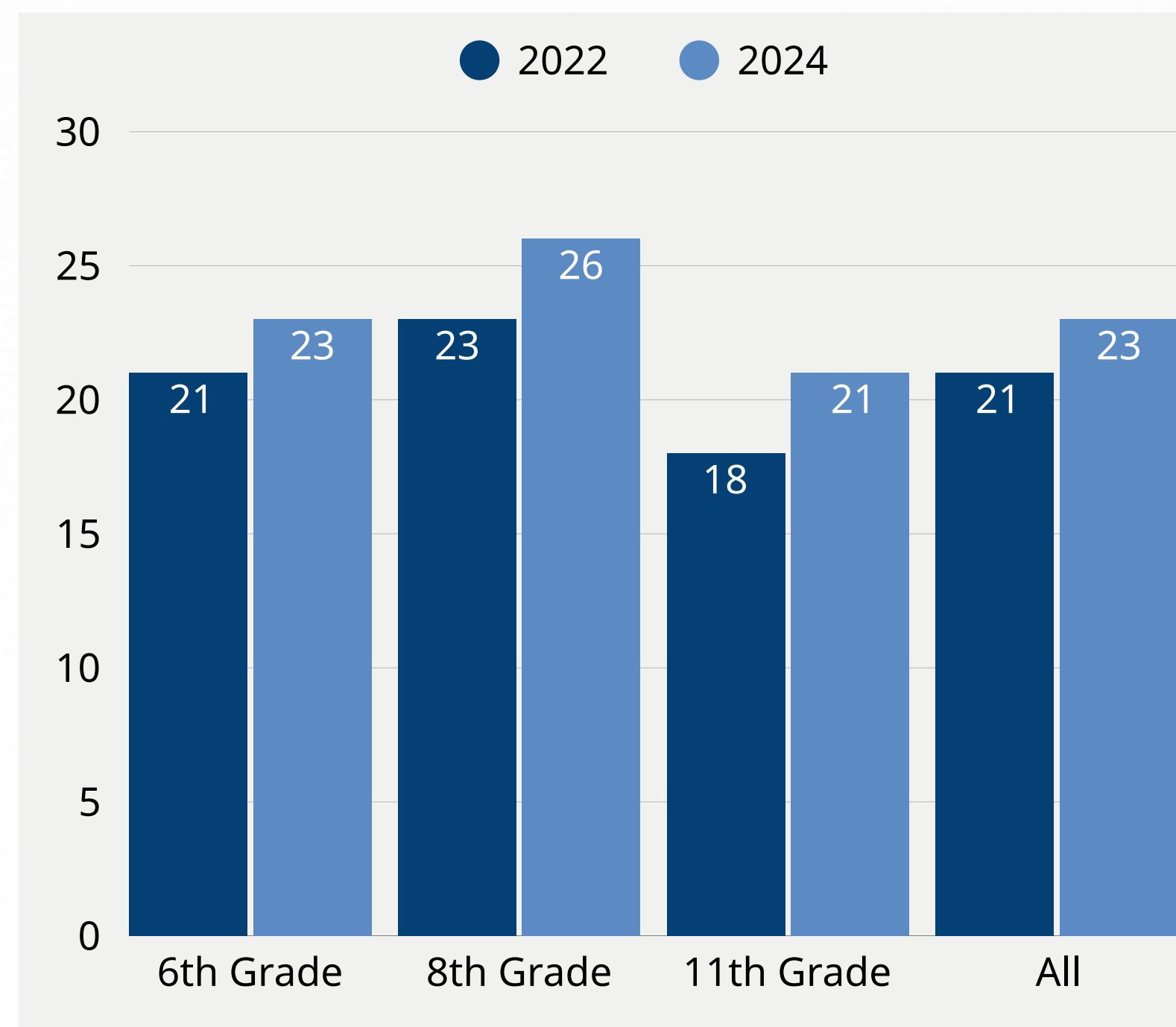
Concerns regarding youth gambling have intensified in recent years, driven by increased accessibility through online platforms, common use of gambling features embedded into games marketed to youth, and the widespread normalization of sports betting. Aggressive advertising campaigns, often featuring sports figures and celebrities who are particularly popular among young people, have contributed to making gambling appear as an ordinary and exciting aspect of sports fandom. This glamorization blurs the boundaries between entertainment and high-risk activities. The impacts of gambling on youth extend far beyond the financial problems typically associated with gambling. Research examining youth gambling behaviors has found direct links between gambling and increased substance use,¹ mental health challenges,² bullying,³ and delinquent behaviors.⁴

The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) is a national survey organized by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and conducted by state departments of health and education. Oregon's version of the YRBSS is entitled the Oregon Student Health Survey (SHS). The YRBSS does not include questions about gambling; however, state agencies participating in the survey are allowed to add state-specific questions. The SHS has included gambling-related questions since 2020; prior to that, youth gambling surveillance was fielded in other state-wide surveys. In 2022, the SHS methods were revised, including the gambling-related question set. Because of these survey method differences between 2022 and prior years, the present report focuses on findings from the 2022 and 2024 surveys.

This report provides estimates of gambling prevalence, identifies levels of at-risk gambling behavior (for 11th-grade students), and examines associations between gambling and a range of health, substance-use, and well-being factors. The 2022 survey was based on a sample of 45,599 6th-, 8th-, and 11th-grade students from 327 Oregon schools. The 2024 survey included 62,251 students in the same grade levels, representing 533 Oregon schools. For additional details on the surveys, refer to Oregon Student Health Survey (2024)⁵ and Oregon Student Health Survey (2022).⁶

Gambling Participation Rates on the Rise Among Oregon Youth

Chart 1. Gambled in the past three months (%)



Youth were asked whether they had participated in any gambling activities during the previous three months. **Gambling and betting were defined as something that “involves the risking of something of value (money, a watch, a soda, etc.) on a game or event in order to win money or something of value.** The overall rate among 6th, 8th, and 11th graders in 2024 was 23%, compared to 20% in 2022, representing a 14% increase over two years.

In 2024, participation was highest among 8th graders and lowest among 11th graders. The largest increase between 2022 and 2024 occurred among 11th graders, whose reported gambling rose by 18%.

Gambling prevalence rates varied significantly by gender identity. Among youth, in 2024, 31% of those identifying as boys or men and 15% of those identifying as girls or women reported gambling in the past three months. Additionally, 27% of youth who identified with a different gender classification reported gambling during the same period. Compared to 2022, boys or men had the largest increase of 19%, followed by youth who identified with a different gender classification (15%), and girls or women (14%)

Survey participants were asked which specific types of gambling activities they had engaged in. Overall, across all grades and both years, skill-based gambling activities were the most popular, followed by games of chance and sports-related activities.

Between 2022 and 2024, online gambling activities showed the greatest increase (58%), followed by lottery (45%), games of chance (28%), skill-based activities (19%), and sports-related activities (15%). Other activity types remained unchanged. These findings suggest a broadening and deepening of youth gambling involvement, particularly in online formats, which pose heightened risks due to their accessibility and convenience.

Among those who reported gambling, the average number of gambling activities was 1.7 in 2024 and 1.6 in 2022. Averages varied slightly by grade, with 6th graders reporting the lowest average across years (1.5) and 11th graders the highest (1.7).

Table 1. 2022 Gambling Activity Results

Activity	6th Grade	8th Grade	11th Grade	All
Skill	7.6%	9.6%	7.2%	8.1%
Chance	4.6%	6.7%	6.5%	5.9%
Sports	3.3%	4.1%	4.2%	3.9%
Other	2.8%	3.4%	2.5%	2.9%
Online	1.4%	2.4%	3.2%	2.3%
Lottery	1.5%	2.2%	1.6%	1.8%

Table 2. 2024 Gambling Activity Results

Activity	6th Grade	8th Grade	11th Grade	All
Skill	8.8%	10.9%	9.3%	9.7%
Chance	5.2%	8.9%	8.4%	7.6%
Sports	3.3%	5.1%	4.9%	4.4%
Other	2.9%	3.3%	2.5%	2.9%
Online	2.3%	3.9%	4.7%	3.7%
Lottery	2.1%	2.9%	2.6%	2.6%

Relationship Between Gambling & Risk-Taking Behaviors

Engaging in gambling activities is often part of a broader pattern of risk-taking behaviors among adolescents. Analysis of the survey data shows that youth who reported gambling were also more likely to engage in other risk behaviors, such as sexual activity and substance use. These associations suggest that gambling may share underlying behavioral, social, or environmental factors with other forms of risk-taking, highlighting the importance of addressing these behaviors within an integrated prevention framework.

Sexual activity

The surveys asked 8th and 11th-graders whether they had ever engaged in sexual behavior with another person. In 2024, youth who gambled were 1.2 times more likely to have engaged in sexual behaviors than those who did not gamble (22% versus 18%). In 2022, this association was stronger: youth who gambled were 1.4 times more likely to have engaged in sexual behavior than their non-gambling peers (28% versus 20%).

In both 2022 and 2024, 8th graders showed the strongest association between gambling and sexual activity. Those who gambled had rates of sexual activity nearly twice as high as their non-gambling peers.

By gender identification, youth identifying as gender diverse had the highest rates of sexual activity associated with gambling, with slightly more than 30% reporting sexual activity in both 2022 and 2024.

Cyber-bullying by peers

The surveys asked youth whether they had been bullied by another student using any form of technology, such as texting or the internet. Overall, across both survey years, those who gambled reported being bullied more than twice as often as those who did not gamble (11% versus 5% in 2024, and 14% versus 8% in 2022).

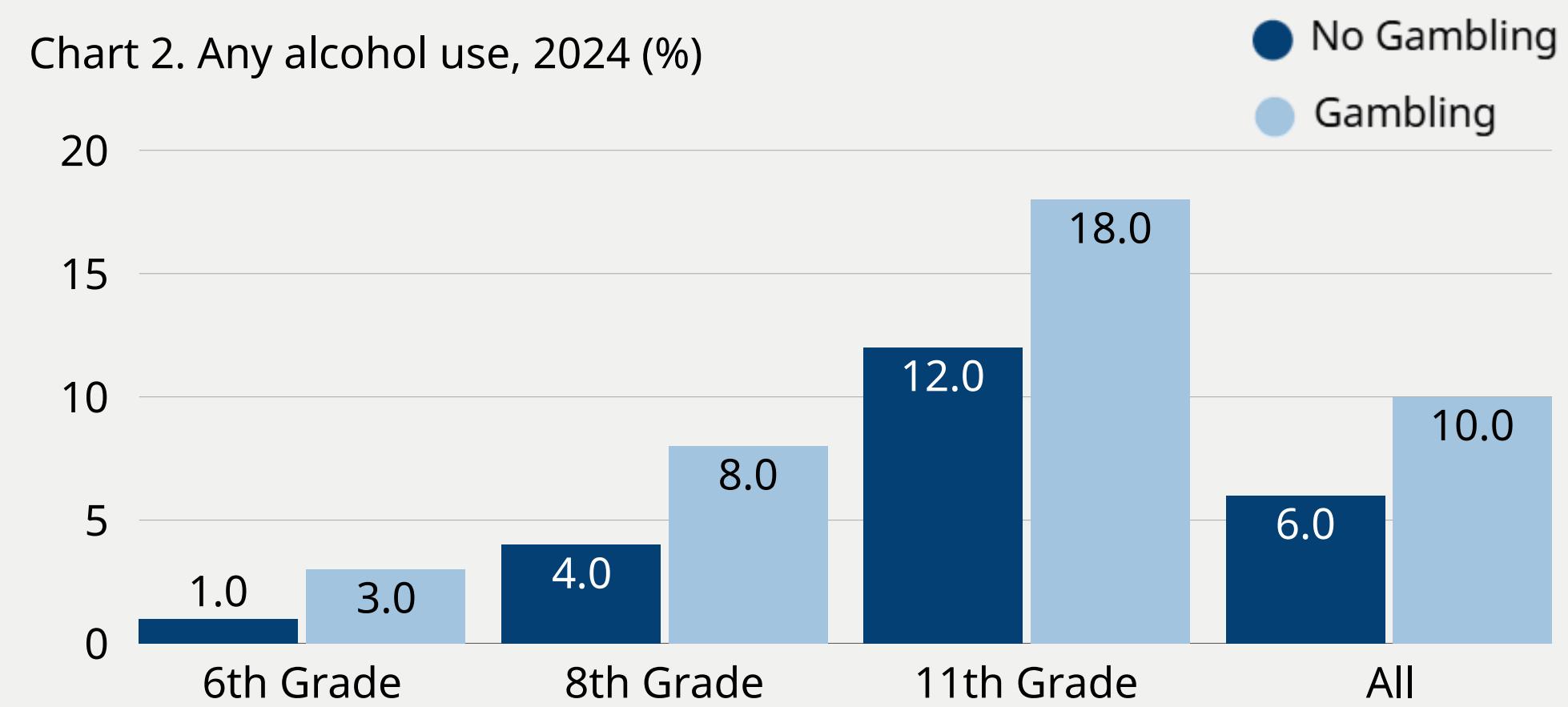
For both survey years, 6th- and 8th-grade students were the most affected, each reporting bullying rates a little more than twice as high as their non-gambling peers, while 11th graders reported being bullied 1.6 times as often.

Moreover, across both surveys, girls/women who reported gambling experienced bullying at 2.3 times the rate of their non-gambling peers, representing the highest gambling association among gender groups.

Alcohol consumption

Youth were asked if they had consumed at least one drink of alcohol in the past 30 days. In both years, youth who reported gambling had higher rates of alcohol consumption: 1.6 times higher in 2024 and 2.0 times higher in 2022. The association between alcohol use and gambling was strongest among 6th graders, where rates were three times higher. However, in absolute terms, the difference was greatest among 11th graders, with a 6% increase.

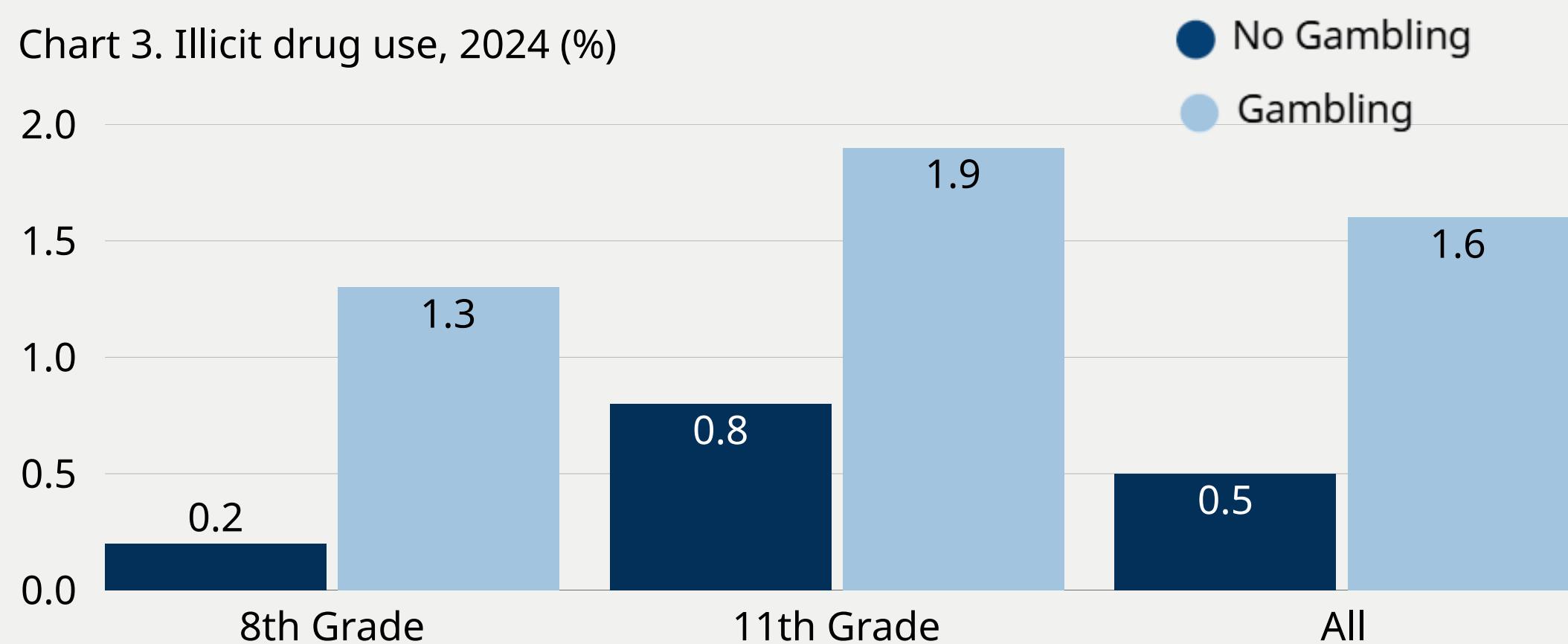
Chart 2. Any alcohol use, 2024 (%)



Illicit drug use

The surveys asked 8th and 11th-grade students whether they had used illicit drugs. Across both years, students who gambled were about three times more likely to report using substances compared to those who did not. In 2024, the association was strongest among 8th graders who gambled, who were nearly six times more likely to report using illicit drugs, and among gender diverse youth who gambled, who were nearly eight times more likely to do so.

Chart 3. Illicit drug use, 2024 (%)



Marijuana use

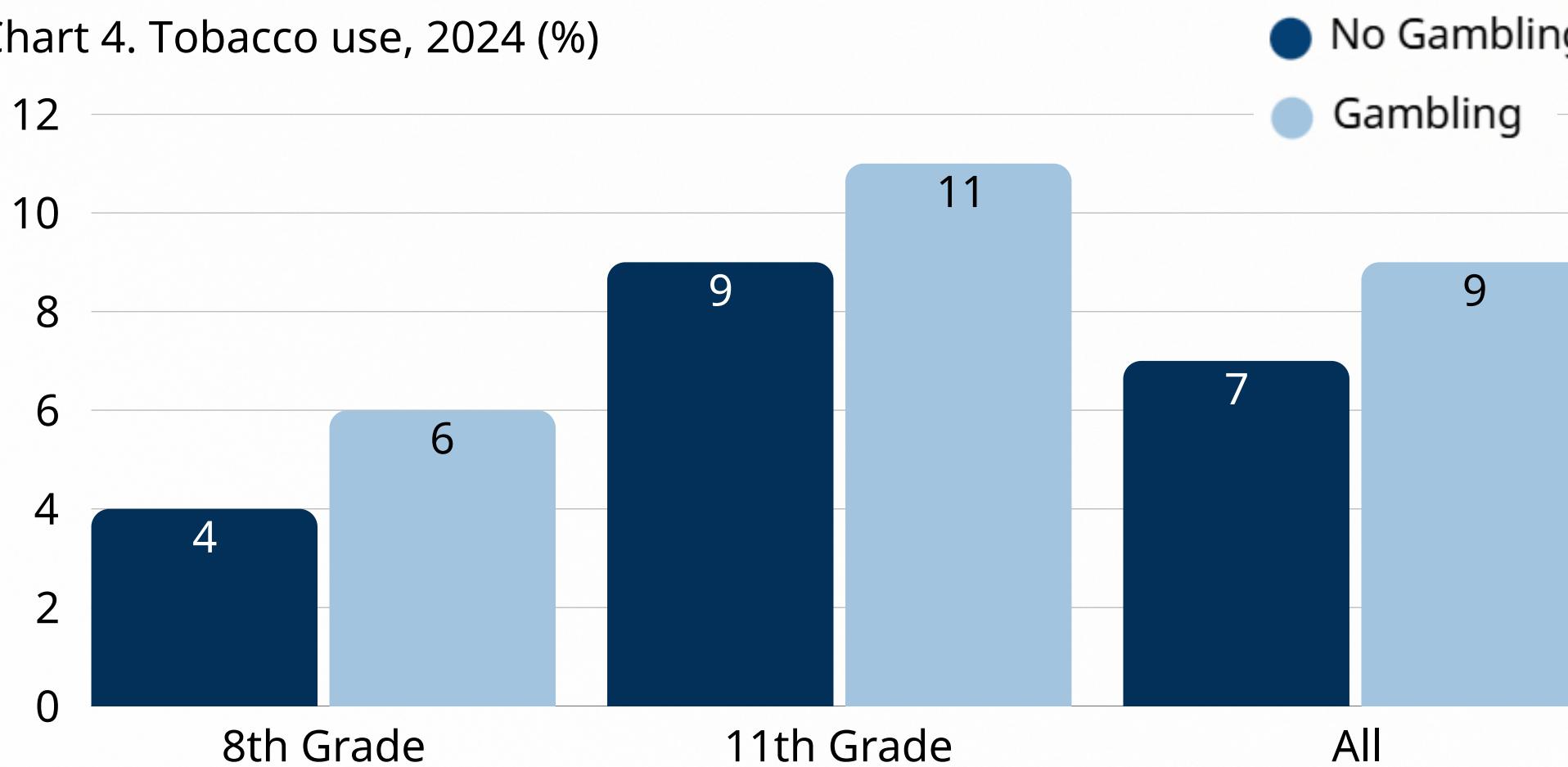
The 2024 survey asked youth participants whether they had used marijuana (in any form) in the past 30 days. Overall, youth who gambled were 1.3 times more likely to report marijuana use (5.8% vs. 4.3%). The largest difference was among 6th graders, where those who gambled were 4.3 times more likely to use marijuana (0.9% vs. 0.2%).

Sixth graders and youth who identify as gender diverse who gamble are 4.0 and 2.1 times more likely, respectively, to use cannabis compared to those who do not gamble.

Tobacco use

The 2024 survey asked 6th graders whether they had used vape products, cigarettes, or chewing tobacco in the past 30 days. Among those who gambled, they were 2.7 times more likely to have used at least one of these products (2.7% versus 1.0%). Both the 2022 and 2024 surveys asked 8th and 11th graders whether they had used cigarettes, vaping products, chewing tobacco, cigarillos, or any other tobacco products.* Overall, youth who gambled were 1.3 times more likely to use these products in 2024, and 1.8 times more likely in 2022. Among 8th graders, those who gambled in the past 30 days were 1.7 times more likely to use tobacco products, while among 11th graders, the rate was 1.3 times higher.

Chart 4. Tobacco use, 2024 (%)



A Growing Concern: Vaping

In the 2024 survey, 8th graders who reported gambling were 1.6 times more likely to report vaping in the past 30 days compared to those who had not gambled (5.5% vs. 3.4%).

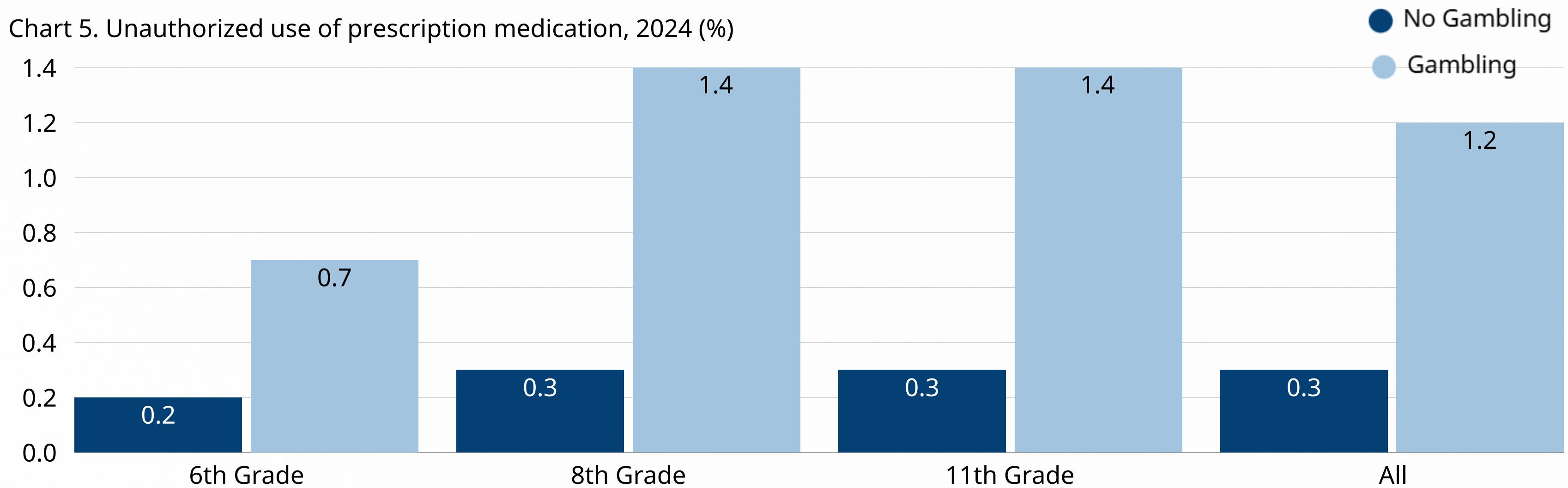


*Note: The corresponding 2022 data were collected using a different methodology and are not directly comparable.

Use of prescription drugs without medical direction

In the 2024 survey, participants were asked whether they had used prescription drugs without a doctor's orders or differently than prescribed during the previous 30 days. Youth who gambled were 4.6 times more likely to report misuse of prescription medication. This association was consistent across grade levels, with the largest difference among 11th graders, where rates were 5.2 times higher for those who gambled compared to those who did not. Moreover, youth who identified as gender diverse were nearly eight times more likely to misuse prescription drugs if they engaged in gambling.

Chart 5. Unauthorized use of prescription medication, 2024 (%)

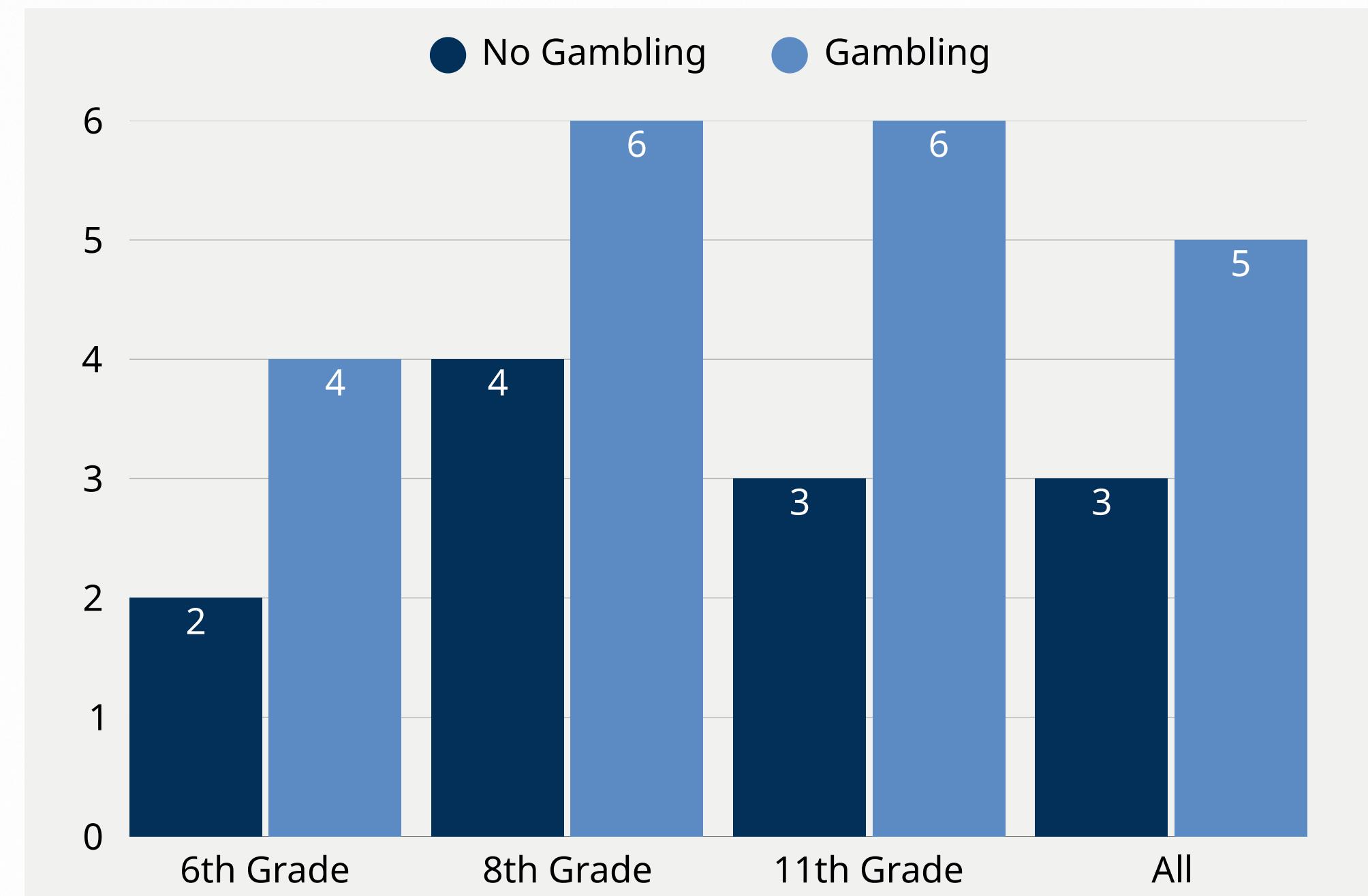


Higher Rates of Suicidality & Sadness Among Youth Who Gamble

The surveys asked youth whether they had attempted suicide in the past year. Overall, in 2024, youth who gambled were 1.8 times more likely to report a suicide attempt (5.4% versus 3.0%), up from 1.5 times in 2022 (6.2% versus 4.1%). In all cases, the likelihood of a suicide attempt was associated with gambling activity. Among 11th graders, those who reported gambling were twice as likely to report a suicide attempt as those who did not. Youth who identified as girls/women were also more than twice as likely to report a suicide attempt if they gambled.

The surveys also asked youth whether they had ever felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that they stopped doing some of their usual activities. Similar to the association observed between suicidality and gambling, youth who gambled reported higher levels of these feelings. Overall, across both survey years, youth who gambled were 1.2 times more likely to experience such feelings (37% versus 30% in 2024, and 43% versus 35% in 2022).

Chart 6. Suicide attempt, 2024 (%)



Gambling's Associations On Confidence & Future Plans

The 2024 survey asked youth about their plans following high school. Gambling participation appears to be associated with a shift toward career-entry or vocational pathways rather than academic pathways. This finding may reflect a combination of social and psychological factors arising from shared underlying influences, including socioeconomic conditions, risk orientation, and access to opportunities.

Youth were also asked to evaluate the statement "I can do most things if I try" using a 4-point Likert scale (Table 4). Youth who gamble and those who do not report very similar levels of self-efficacy, that is, confidence in their ability to do what they try. Roughly the same proportion of both groups endorsed "Very Much True" or "Pretty Much True," indicating no meaningful difference in high self-efficacy. However, differences emerge at the lower end of the scale: youth who gamble were 1.6 times more likely to report "Not at all True," suggesting that a small but distinct subset of youth who gamble feel less capable or confident in achieving their goals.

Table 3. Most likely to do following high-school, 2024

Track	Increased Likelihood to Gamble
Trade School	1.6
Military	1.6
FT Work	1.1
2-Year College	1.0
PT Work	0.9
4-Year College	0.9

Table 4. Statement: "I can do most things if I try", 2024

	Very Much True	Pretty Much True	A Little True	Not At All True
No Gambling	36.6%	46.7%	15.5%	1.2%
Gambling	36.2%	45.2%	16.6%	2.0%
Increased Likelihood if Gambles	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.6

More Youth Screened as At-risk for Problem Gambling

In addition to all the same gambling questions on the 6th grade and 8th grade surveys, 11th graders were asked to complete the Brief Adolescent Gambling Screen (BAGS). The BAGS is a three-item screening tool designed to identify problem gambling in adolescents. It is considered a valid and reliable measure, with high sensitivity (0.88) and specificity (0.98) in identifying adolescent problem gambling.⁷ Because it is not a diagnostic tool, those scoring above a cut-off score are considered “at-risk” for problem gambling.

This report presents the results of applying a slightly modified version of the BAGS used in the surveys. The modification involves using a three-month lookback period instead of the original twelve-month period to align the timeframe with other gambling-related questions in the survey.

Among the 11th-grade students who reported gambling in the last three months, the at-risk rate was 3.6% in 2024, up slightly from 3.5% in 2022. This data suggests that the overall increase in at-risk youth is largely attributable to the expanding number of adolescents engaging in gambling activities, which in turn increases the pool of youth potentially at risk for gambling-related problems. Thus, although the rate of at-risk gambling changed only slightly, the total number of youth gambling has increased, meaning that **the number of youth exhibiting at-risk problem gambling has increased.**

Modified BAGS (Brief Adolescent Gambling Screen)*

Response Set

0-Never, 1-Sometimes, 2-Most of the time, 3-Almost always

Items. During the last 3 months, how often have you:

1. Skipped hanging out with friends or family who do not gamble or bet to hang out with friends or family who do gamble or bet?
2. Felt that you might have a problem with gambling or betting?
3. Hidden your gambling or betting from your parents, other family members, or teachers?

Scoring. Sum the scores. Scores of 4+ indicate at-risk problem gambling.

**The original BAGS uses a past 12-month time frame. No other modifications to the original were made.*

Table 5. At-risk problem gambling (%) among 11th graders

	2022	2024	Change
Girl/Woman	0.12%	0.21%	71%
Boy/Man	1.02%	1.15%	12%
Gender Diverse	0.73%	1.69%	130%
All	0.60%	0.72%	20%

By gender identification, gender diverse 11th grade youth showed the largest percentage increase, followed by girls or women, and boys or men. Thus, while the boy or man cohort had the highest overall gambling prevalence, gender diverse youth experienced substantially greater increases in gambling-related harm.



The Escalating Risks of Gambling Involvement

The previous discussion showed that at-risk gambling behavior has increased over the past two years, as measured by the modified BAGS risk assessment tool. In this section, we examine the associations among 11th graders classified as at-risk in 2024. An increase in risky behaviors associated with gambling and the additional risks linked to being classified as at-risk for gambling-related harm were observed.

There are several notable patterns. First, 11th graders classified as at-risk for problem gambling display substantially higher rates of other risky behaviors, particularly the misuse of prescription medications and the use of illicit drugs. Being bullied and attempting suicide also stand out as major correlates. Second, the risk increases are consistently higher for those at risk compared to those who report engaging in gambling activities. For example, while individuals who gamble are 5.2 times more likely to misuse prescription drugs compared to those who do not gamble, those classified as at-risk are 32 times more likely to do so. This pattern demonstrates an escalation of risk behaviors that can be observed both between 11th graders who gamble versus those who do not, and between those who gamble without signs of harm and those who exhibit behaviors consistent with gambling-related problems.

Table 6. Increase in likelihood in engaging in risky behaviors, 2024

	Engage in Gambling	At-Risk Problem Gambling
Sexual Activities	1.3	1.6
Misuse of Prescription Medication	5.2	31.7
Alcohol Use	1.5	1.7
Cannabis Use	1.3	2.1
Illicit Drug Use	2.5	16.4
Tobacco Use	1.3	2
Being Cyberbullied	1.6	5.1
Attempting Suicide	2	4.3
Experiencing Sadness	1.1	1.3

What The Findings Tell Us

The 2022 and 2024 Oregon Student Health Survey results highlight a growing public health concern around youth gambling in Oregon.

- **Gambling participation is increasing**, particularly among middle school boys and those engaging in online gambling. This trend suggests that gambling is becoming more normalized and accessible among youth, potentially fueled by online platforms and digital gaming environments that blur the boundaries between play and wagering.
- Gambling is closely linked to a broader constellation of risk behaviors and emotional vulnerabilities. Youth who gamble are significantly more likely to engage in substance use, experience bullying, report sexual activity, and exhibit signs of emotional distress, such as hopelessness and suicidal behavior. These overlapping risks suggest that **gambling may serve as both a marker and a multiplier of other health and behavioral challenges**. The findings underscore the need for integrated prevention strategies that address gambling alongside substance use, mental health, and other forms of risk-taking.
- The **heightened risk among 11th graders classified as at-risk for problem gambling** is particularly concerning. The data show a clear pattern in which greater gambling involvement is associated with a higher likelihood of prescription medication misuse and illicit drug use, bullying, and suicide attempts. This pattern reinforces that early gambling participation can set the stage for more serious harm, emphasizing the importance of prevention efforts that address not only problem gambling but also early signs of risky gambling behavior.
- **Gambling is associated with shifts in future orientation**, where youth who gamble are more likely to pursue immediate career pathways rather than higher education, which has implications for academic engagement and long-term socioeconomic trajectories. This highlights the importance of embedding gambling prevention and awareness into broader youth development and resilience-building initiatives, including educational and mental health programming.

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Appendix

Increase in Likelihood in Engaging in Risky Behaviors, 2022

	Engage in Gambling	At-Risk Problem Gambling
Sexual Activities	1.4	1.1
Misuse of Prescription Medication	2.6	23.4
Alcohol Use	1.8	2.3
Cannabis Use	N/A	N/A
Illicit Drug Use	3.2	17.4
Tobacco Use	1.8	3.2
Being Cyberbullied	1.6	4.4
Attempting Suicide	1.4	1
Experiencing Sadness	1	1.2