Colorado
Academic Standards

Comprehensive Health

High School

Revised *Drug Prevention and Risk Management Standards*
Adopted October 15, 2026

COLORADO
Department of Education

ALL STUDENTS • ALL STANDARDS

Comprehensive Health Education

High School, Standard 4. Prevention and Risk Management

Prepared Graduates:

5. Apply knowledge and skills to make life-enhancing decisions regarding the use of cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, opioids, alcohol, and nicotine.

Grade Level Expectation:

1. Analyze the impact of individuals' use or nonuse of cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, opioids, alcohol, and nicotine.

GLE Code: CH.HS.4.1

Evidence Outcomes

Students Can:

a. Analyze immediate and long-term consequences of substance use and misuse on self and others, including risks such as overdose, death, injury, blood-borne diseases from injection use, violence, and impacts on health, relationships, and quality of life, using examples involving cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, opioids, alcohol, binge drinking, nicotine, and other substances including combined use.

b. Differentiate between intended use, experimentation, misuse, substance use disorders, addiction, and dependency using definitions and examples.

c. Analyze how substance use disorders are a chronic, treatable disease by examining the effect of addictive substance use on brain chemistry and structure, behaviors, and decision-making abilities.

d. Assess situations to determine risky or hazardous substance use and when or how to intervene appropriately by supporting peers and encouraging help-seeking behavior and accessing emergency services when needed.

e. Assess the various ways substances are consumed and how different manners of substance consumption may result in different health risks and potential for misuse and addiction.

f. Access valid and reliable information and resources to support prevention, early intervention, overdose response, treatment, and recovery including national, local and community-based supports.

g. Describe how adolescent brain development and substance use influences decision-making and risk behaviors, including the increased vulnerability to substance use and addiction.

Academic Context and Connections

Colorado Essential Skills and Real-World Application:

1. Analyze short-term and long-term physical, financial, social, and psychological costs of substance use and addiction on self and others. (Professional Skills: Use Information and Communication Technologies)

2. Analyze how local, state, and federal laws regulating cannabis, opioids, prescription drugs, alcohol, and nicotine function as public health tools to limit access, reduce risk, and counter the normalization of substance use across communities to reduce harm, create safer social environments, and support people in living well. (Civic/Interpersonal Skills: Global/Cultural Awareness)

3. Explore how substance use disorder progresses from intended or experimental use to misuse to habitual or compulsive use to physiological dependency, and examine why this progression is not inevitable, linear, or a reflection of personal weakness and influenced by a variety of factors. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Critical Thinking/Problem Solving)

4. Analyze data to determine to what extent cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drug use and misuse, alcohol, and nicotine contribute to physical and mental health. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Critical Thinking/Problem Solving)

5. Describe how continued substance use changes the brain, including its effects on neurotransmitters (dopamine, endorphins, etc.) and how these changes drive compulsive use, loss of control, substance seeking behaviors, and development of addiction. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Inquiry/Analysis)

6. Evaluate the different ways substances are consumed and the variable risks for long-term health issues, including the risk of infection, overdose, cancers, heart or lung disease, addiction, etc. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Inquiry/Analysis)

7. Analyze current and emerging substance-use trends, including consumption methods and the evolution of new substances on the market. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Inquiry/Analysis)

Inquiry Questions:

1. Is there a relationship between substance use (alcohol, nicotine, or drugs) and increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors?

2. What could happen if I relied on substances to solve situational needs I was confronted with (e.g., body image, athletic performance enhancement, thrill-seeking, stress, or emotional pain)?

3. How could an individual's substance misuse potentially generate broader harm to friends, families, communities, and public health systems?

4. How do genetics, environments, life experiences, and other factors work together to influence personal risk for addiction and the decisions you make?

5. What are some life-enhancing behaviors that I can do to feel good and improve situational needs (e.g., body image, athletic and academic performance enhancement, thrill-seeking, stress, or emotional pain)?
6. How can commonly prescribed medications used to treat pain, anxiety, sleep disorders, attention disorders, and other conditions lead to physical dependency or substance use disorders, and what responsibilities do patients, families, prescribers, and healthcare systems share in preventing prescription drug misuse?
7. How can the use of various substances alter brain chemistry and structure, behaviors, and decision-making abilities, and how is it different between a fully developed and under-developed brain? How does the timing of first substance use shape brain development and long-term addiction risk?
8. How has the rise of counterfeit or contaminated pills (e.g., with fentanyl) changed the immediate risk of substance experimentation, and what public health strategies (such as drug-checking education and access to naloxone and other overdose reversal medications) exist to counter this threat?
9. If a prescription drug is offered by a friend who says "it's prescribed, so it's safe," how would you evaluate that claim? What actions would you take to protect yourself and others?

Health Skills:

1. Analyze Influences
2. Decision Making

High School, Standard 4. Prevention and Risk Management

Prepared Graduates:

5. Apply knowledge and skills to make life-enhancing decisions regarding the use of cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, opioids, alcohol, and nicotine.

Grade Level Expectation:

2. Analyze the factors that influence an individual's use or nonuse of substances.

GLE Code: CH.HS.4.2

Evidence Outcomes

Students Can:

1. Analyze positive and negative influences that affect substance use or nonuse including biological, psychological, and social factors (e.g., stress, trauma, anxiety, depression, family, peers, community, environments, media, including social media, marketing strategies, cultural norms, and stigma).
2. Analyze how mental health conditions, emotional well-being, stress, trauma, anxiety, grief, and adverse life experiences influence substance-use decisions and behaviors.
3. Describe how technology, social and cultural influences, government policy, and socioeconomic factors influence access to substances as well as prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery support.
4. Analyze how stigmatizing language and negative perceptions of people who use substances create barriers to medical care, treatment access, and recovery support and how using person-first language can help reduce those barriers and improve access to support and care.

Academic Context and Connections

Colorado Essential Skills and Real-World Application:

1. Analyze how agriculture, lobbying, manufacturing, and distribution support targeted marketing to maintain or increase sales of alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, and prescription medications. (Professional Skills: Use Information and Communication Technologies)
2. Evaluate how your current environment and other environments can increase or decrease access to cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, and nicotine. (Professional Skills: Use Information and Communication Technologies)
3. Explore how technologies and societal changes (e.g. synthetic drugs, legalization, vaping technology, naloxone and other overdose reversal medications, social media, artificial intelligence, etc.) have shifted the knowledge and skills needed to make decisions. (Civic/Interpersonal Skills: Global/Cultural Awareness)

4. Analyze how media, including social media, culture, social pressures, stress, biological factors, and mental health positively and negatively influence decisions related to cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, and nicotine. (Personal Skills: Self Awareness/Self-Management)
5. Evaluate how stigmatizing language influences substance use, medical care, and access to treatment and recovery support systems. (Civic/Interpersonal Skills: Global/Cultural Awareness)
6. Research why some people turn to substances to cope with stress, trauma, or mental health struggles, while others find different ways to cope and what can be done to build more protective factors in our own lives and communities. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Inquiry/Analysis)

Inquiry Questions:

1. Why would I choose not to use cannabis, illicit drugs, alcohol, and nicotine or misuse prescription drugs when it can feel like "everyone is doing it" and social pressure or expectations may encourage me to use substances?
2. What is the reality vs. perceived reality of substance use in my community? (Use local school or community data.)
3. How do I make life-enhancing decisions?
4. How do the people, culture, media, including social media, environments, and beliefs around me influence my choices, and what can I do to protect my health, future, and values?
5. What is stigma and how does it influence my decisions and the decisions of others?
6. In what ways might certain audiences be specifically marketed to when it comes to different substances? Why?
7. How do lobbying, marketing, and promoting misleading information change perception of risk, and what is the real human cost?
8. How have technologies and/or societal changes (e.g., synthetic drugs, legalization, vaping technology, availability of naloxone and other overdose reversal medications, social media, artificial intelligence, etc.) shifted the knowledge and skills we need to make decisions?
9. How has social media and technology affected the way individuals access substances and how individuals may be targeted or coerced into substance use?
10. How do media, professional athletes, celebrities, and social media influencers portray positive and negative examples of substance use and misuse?
11. What do you do when your own values differ from those around you or the environment that you live in?

Health Skills:

1. Analyzing Influences

High School, Standard 4. Prevention and Risk Management

Prepared Graduates:

5. Apply knowledge and skills to make life-enhancing decisions regarding the use of cannabis, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, opioids, alcohol, and nicotine.

Grade Level Expectation:

3. Develop interpersonal communication skills to refuse or avoid using or misusing substances.

GLE Code: CH.HS.4.3

Evidence Outcomes:

Students Can:

a. Demonstrate verbal and nonverbal refusal skills to avoid the use or misuse of substances.

b. Demonstrate advocacy skills to mitigate unsafe situations for self and others when substances are present (e.g., operating a motor vehicle or driving in a car with someone who is impaired).

c. Demonstrate communication skills to help others to avoid substance use or misuse, including for alcohol, nicotine, opioids, cannabis, prescription drugs, and other illicit substances.

d. Demonstrate advocacy skills for self and others to seek help and access support for substance use or misuse at home, in school, or in the community.

Academic Context and Connections

Colorado Essential Skills and Real-World Application:

1. Evaluate why communication and media literacy skills will need to change as communication technology changes. (Professional Skills: Use Information and Communication Technologies)

2. Identify how medical advances and new technologies could be used to prevent substance use or injuries. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Creativity/Innovation)

3. Examine how knowledge, accurate information, and effective decision making and communication skills can help people make healthy choices that benefit themselves and others. (Personal Skills: Personal Responsibility)

Inquiry Questions:

1. Describe things you can do and say to avoid substance use or misuse for yourself and others in different situations (e.g., sports, parties, after school, or at home).

2. What makes some refusal strategies more effective than others, and why might the same strategy succeed in one situation but fail in another (e.g., different social situations, driving or riding with an impaired driver, peer pressure, unfamiliar locations, with family and friends, through social media, etc.)?

3. When faced with peer pressure, how do you choose a refusal strategy that protects both your health and your relationships?
4. How would you express concern and support others without using language that makes them feel judged or ashamed?
5. When is it appropriate to involve a trusted adult, and how do you do that without feeling like you betrayed your friend?
6. What are your options when you realize a driver is impaired, and how do you plan ahead, overcome social barriers, and ensure you always have a safe way home?
7. How could knowledge about substances and recovery resources support a conversation with friends or family members who are struggling?

Health Skills:

1. Interpersonal Communication

High School, Standard 4. Prevention and Risk Management

Prepared Graduates:

5. Apply knowledge and skills to make health-enhancing decisions regarding the use of cannabis, illicit substances, prescription drugs, alcohol, opioids and nicotine.

Grade Level Expectation:

4. Develop self-management skills to improve short-term and long-term health outcomes by abstaining, delaying, reducing use, or decreasing substance use risks.

GLE Code: CH.HS.4.4

Evidence Outcomes

Students Can:

a. Develop a personal plan that identifies potential triggers and outlines specific strategies to improve health, reduce risks associated with substance use, and manage external influences.

b. Demonstrate the ability to analyze personal behaviors related to substance use or misuse and other health-related decisions.

c. Demonstrate coping strategies by identifying and applying substance-free alternatives to manage stress, trauma, and emotional regulation.

Academic Context and Connections

Colorado Essential Skills and Real-World Application:

1. Evaluate how large-scale traumatic or isolating events such as pandemics, conflict, or community-wide crises create conditions that increase a population's vulnerability to substance use. (Civic/Interpersonal Skills: Global/Cultural Awareness)

2. Examine how personal experiences, including emotional or physical trauma, shape an individual's relationship with substances as a means of coping, escape, or self-medication. (Personal Skills: Self Awareness)

3. Identify effective strategies and healthy behaviors for short- and long-term physical health and explore how those strategies and behaviors help to avoid and reduce substance use or misuse. (Personal Skills: Personal Responsibility)

4. Evaluate nicotine delivery methods and their potential effects on the developing brain, health risks, and overall well-being, and apply self-management skills to abstain from, delay, or reduce nicotine use.

5. Explore the attitudes, behaviors, and substance-use patterns within your family and community. (Civic/Interpersonal Skills: Global/Cultural Awareness)

6. Evaluate specific dangers related to synthetic drugs, including fentanyl and counterfeit medications, the frequency of their presence in legal and illicit drugs or substances, and how

they relate to the higher likelihood of death after fentanyl overdose, including accidental overdose.

Inquiry Questions:

1. Chasing enjoyment and trying to avoid pain are both recognized reasons for substance use; how are they different and similar?
2. Why might substance use increase after a traumatic event or during times of stress?
3. What healthy, proven alternatives to substance use can you draw on when navigating stress, grief, trauma, or anxiety, and what makes them more effective?
4. What local, state, and national resources exist to support individuals at every stage of substance use from prevention, early intervention, and reduction to treatment and long-term recovery?
5. How can emotional or physical trauma increase an individual's susceptibility to substance use as a means of relief, escape, or self-medication?
6. What conditions do large-scale traumatic or isolating events create, and how do those conditions drive increases in substance use across affected populations?

Health Skills:

1. Self-Management/Personal Responsibility

Proposed New Grade Level Expectation for Prevention and Risk Management addressing first aid support CPR legislation and opioid overdose identification and prevention.

High School, Standard 4. Prevention and Risk Management

Prepared Graduates:

7. Apply personal safety knowledge and skills to prevent and treat injury.

Grade Level Expectation:

10. Students will develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to recognize medical emergencies and provide appropriate first aid responses.

GLE Code: CH.HS.4.11

Evidence Outcomes

Students Can:

a. Identify current laws and legislation that pertain to emergency situations (e.g., Good Samaritan law, access to overdose response medications such as naloxone and other overdose reversal medications) including youth possession, expired doses, and legal protections).

b. Recognize how stigma, barriers, and laws can affect a person's decision to call for help or respond during an overdose or medical emergency.

c. Recognize and respond to medical emergencies, including cardiac arrest, severe bleeding, shock, respiratory distress, diabetic emergencies, and opioid overdose and the administration of naloxone and other overdose reversal medications when appropriate and available.

d. Demonstrate appropriate procedures for accessing emergency response equipment, calling 911, and effectively communicating critical information.

Academic Context and Connections

Colorado Essential Skills and Real-World Application:

1. Examine valid and reliable information about first aid protocols, harm reduction strategies (e.g., availability of naloxone and other overdose reversal medications, protections in Good Samaritan laws), and correct overdose response protocols. (Professional Skills: Information Literacy)

2. Investigate how and where naloxone and other overdose reversal medications can be accessed in the community, including pharmacies, schools, community organizations, and public health agencies, and evaluate factors that may influence an individual's ability to obtain and use naloxone and other overdose reversal medications during an overdose emergency. (Civic/Interpersonal Skills: Global/Communication)

3. Practice strategies to recognize and respond to life-threatening emergencies. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Inquiry/Analysis)

4. Explore emergency protocols that protect self, others, and community, including clear communications when contacting Emergency Services such as 911. (Civic/Interpersonal Skills: Global/Communication)

5. Analyze how stigma and negative perceptions of substance use can affect a person's response to a medical emergency. (Entrepreneurial Skills: Inquiry/Analysis)

Inquiry Questions:

1. How do you assess and respond to an unresponsive person, and how does recognizing the difference between the signs and symptoms of an overdose, alcohol poisoning, or cardiac arrest change the first aid you provide?

2. What barriers might stop you from acting in the event of an emergency or impact your response, and how can you overcome those barriers?

3. How might stigma and negative perceptions of drug use impact a person's willingness to respond to an emergency?

4. What laws related to substance use do you need to understand regarding providing assistance in a life threatening situation?

5. Who is able to administer naloxone and other overdose reversal medications in an emergency situation?

Health Skills:

1. Decision-Making

2. Self-Management/Personal Responsibility