



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on March 21, 2011

D.C. Fourth Grader Brings Cocaine to School

In what amounts to a highly disturbing case, a fourth grader in Washington D.C. was charged with drug possession after allegedly bringing cocaine to school and sharing it with his classmates, according to authorities. The child is being charged with possession of a controlled substance.

An unknown amount of cocaine was sniffed or swallowed by four students at Thomson Elementary School, and students were then hospitalized after claiming illness on Thursday. The children told their teacher that they inhaled or swallowed an unknown powdery substance and police discovered that the children were ill because they had ingested cocaine.



According to D.C. Fire Department spokesperson Peter Piringer, the students are currently healthy with the exception of having sore throats, and police are still trying to determine how the child came into possession of the drug. In an attempt at damage control, school principal, Albert DuPont, sent home a letter to horror-stricken and enraged parents, written in Chinese, English, and Spanish to reflect the school's various ethnic populations, which stated that the police and child protective services were working on the issue. An automated phone call was also made to parents to further explain the incident.

"This is not a situation that is typical at Thomson, and we take it very seriously," DuPont said in a written statement. "At school we will address drug awareness as a whole-school issue."

In a movement reflecting the feelings of many parents at the school, Stuart Hovell, a parent of a fourth grader, was so disgusted by the episode that he plans to send his daughter to a different school next year.

"It's sad. It's very sad that this is getting into schools," Hovell said.

Drug use among elementary school students is not widespread, and the federal government's two largest annual reports don't survey anyone younger than 12. Among youths surveyed, cocaine use is relatively rare. Overall, however, teen drug use has recently begun to increase after decades of decline. Drugs most abused by 12th-graders are marijuana and prescription and over-the-counter medications, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse.

"It is unusual to have elementary school students using cocaine. However, it's not that unusual for young students to try substances," said Susan E. Foster of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

On average, youths who abuse tobacco, alcohol or marijuana tried it for the first time when they were about 13, she said, and the earlier their initiation, the more likely they were to become addicted.

"Usually, their sources are their friends or their own homes," Foster said, as [reported](#) in the *Washington Post*.



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Ironically, this is the [same school](#) that was once recommended by the *Washington Post* as the perfect D.C. public school to send the Obama girls to. Columnist Jay Matthews, in November 2008, urged the first couple to send their daughters to the school:

Why not see what their tax dollars are paying for? One educational gem happens to be the closest public school to their new home. Strong John Thomson Elementary School is at 1200 L St. NW, three-fifths of a mile from 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Go north on 15th, turn right on L and three blocks farther it's on the right. ...

Sixty-nine percent of Thomson's 355 students are from low-income families. Forty percent are Hispanic, 34 percent black, 22 percent Asian American and 5 percent white. That demographic mix often means remedial instruction and little enrichment, but parents say the school offers a feast of music, art and foreign languages as good as what they would find in a private school. ...

The last president to send a child to a D.C. public school was Jimmy Carter.

(Interestingly, the late Congressman John Rarick, D-La., a well-known conservative legislator of his day, proposed a [resolution](#) in 1973 that would have required federal employees in Washington D.C. to send their children to local public schools, on the grounds that this would help improve conditions in D.C. schools).

The epidemic of cocaine use among youngsters is not limited to Washington D.C., or the United States, for that matter. The British newspaper *The Times* [reports](#) that in the U.K., an estimated total of 65,000 — one in 50 children aged 11-15 — said they had taken cocaine, which is known by euphemisms such as “zip” and “tickets” by youngsters who are increasingly experimenting with the drug. Prosecutor Danny Kushlick says that “cocaine is more available and socially acceptable. Once cocaine use reached acceptability among the 20 and 30-year-olds, it was only a matter of time before it started to become fashionable among youngsters.”

Within the United States, researchers have also found cocaine use to be steadily increasing among adolescents and even preteens. Research also finds that the degradation of the [traditional](#), nuclear family is to blame for this trend — and children whose fathers were incarcerated are more likely to use illicit drugs in adolescence and early adulthood. (In Washington D.C., high incarceration rates among the city's predominately African American men can also be said to account for heightened drug use among children.)

The researchers found that more than 51 percent of young men and almost 40 percent of young women whose fathers were jailed reported using marijuana, and that elevated use of cocaine, methamphetamines, and heroin were also found among this demographic.

The 2004 Survey on Drug Use and Health, formerly called the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse found that among minors, 2.4 percent of the 12- to 17-year-old age group used cocaine at some point in their life, 1.6 percent used cocaine within the past year, and 0.5 percent used cocaine within the past month, and that those who used cocaine were at an [increased risk](#) of developing numerous psychiatric illnesses and learning disabilities, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Bipolar Disorder, and Antisocial Personality Disorder.

A [report](#) in the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* also found that cocaine-exposed (CE) children were more likely to self-report symptoms in the probable clinical range for oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), indicating the need for psychological interventions among cocaine-exposed children (Teresa Linares, [Mental Health Outcomes of Cocaine-Exposed](#)



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Children at 6 Years of Age, January 2006, 31 (1), pp.85-97.)

Also, maternal use of cocaine and other illicit substances during pregnancy can result in these adverse psychiatric and neurological conditions, as indicated by a 1998 Yale University study which found that the incidence of prenatal cocaine exposure in infants seeking medical care primarily through an emergency service might be as high as 1 in 3 to 6 infants in a predominantly inner-city population.

If the Yale study holds true, it is likely that the child who brought the cocaine to school is already an addict, as accidental ingestion of cocaine, passive inhalation of crack cocaine smoke, and transmission through breast milk have been reported as means of cocaine exposure in children. A family history of substance abuse may also be a risk factor for early cocaine use and for rapid dependence on cocaine, which is also likely, considering that the child involved in this disturbing case apparently had such easy access to cocaine.

When handling such cases, [prosecutors](#) typically look at the child's environment, and direct such children and their families to diversion programs, and can make referrals to parenting classes of substance abuse counseling, sometimes as a probationary option.



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