

Kids and Marijuana: The Facts

Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug among America's youth.¹ Among kids who use drugs, approximately 60 percent use marijuana.² Between 1991 and 2001, the number of 8th graders who used marijuana doubled from one in ten to one in five.³

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New research has provided further proof of the risks associated with youth marijuana use. It's important that parents understand the facts about marijuana – and their important role in keeping their kids drug-free.

Marijuana is Addictive

- Research has now established that marijuana is addictive.⁴ Each year, more kids enter treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illicit drugs combined.⁵
- Sixty percent of teens currently in drug treatment have a primary marijuana diagnosis.⁶
- Research also shows that marijuana use is three times more likely to lead to dependence among adolescents than among adults.⁷
- Among those who have used the drug at least five times, the rates of marijuana dependence are estimated at 20-30 percent.⁸
- Among the 220,000 admissions to substance abuse treatment for marijuana in 1999, more than half (57 percent) first used marijuana by the age of 14, and 92 percent by the age of 18.⁹

Today's Marijuana is Stronger

- Today's marijuana is more potent and its effects can be more intense. Research shows that levels of THC (the active ingredient in marijuana) rose from under 1 percent in the mid-1970s to more than 7 percent in 2002. Sinsemilla potency also increased, rising from 6 percent to more than 14 percent in 2002. Studies have found THC levels of more than 30 percent in some grades due to refined cultivation techniques.¹⁰

Marijuana Hurts Young Bodies and Minds

- **The brain.** Smoking marijuana leads to some changes in the brain similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin and alcohol.¹¹
- **Lung damage.** Regular marijuana users often develop breathing problems including chronic coughing and wheezing. Marijuana contains the same cancer-causing chemicals as tobacco. Regardless of THC content, the amount of tar inhaled by marijuana smokers and the level of carbon monoxide absorbed are three to five times greater than among tobacco smokers for similar amounts.¹²
- **Mental health.** For young users, marijuana can lead to increased anxiety, panic attacks, depression and other mental health problems. For those already prone to depression or

anxiety attacks, marijuana use may accelerate or exacerbate problems. One study found that adolescents associated social withdrawal, anxiety and depression, attention problems and thoughts of suicide with past-year marijuana use.¹³

Marijuana Affects Learning and Academic Achievement

- Researchers have found that heavy marijuana use impairs the ability of young people to concentrate and retain information.¹⁴ This may be especially problematic during teens' peak learning years, when their brains are still developing.
- One study found an association between an increase in adolescent marijuana use and a decrease in the likelihood of attaining at least a high school education.¹⁵
- Research found that youths with an average grade of "D" or below were more than four times as likely to have used marijuana in the past year as youths who reported an average grade of "A."¹⁶

Marijuana Linked to Risky Behaviors

- Research shows that kids who regularly smoke marijuana are more likely to engage in risky behaviors that may put their futures in jeopardy, such as more delinquent behavior and aggression, greater rebelliousness, and more associations with delinquent and drug-using friends.¹⁷
- Another study found that young marijuana users in their later teen years were more likely to have an increased risk of delinquency, to have multiple sexual partners, to perceive drugs as not harmful, to have problems with cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana, and to have more friends who exhibit deviant behavior.¹⁸
- According to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, adolescents age 12 to 17 who use marijuana weekly are nine times more likely than non-users to experiment with other illegal drugs or alcohol, five times more likely to steal and nearly four times more likely to engage in violence.¹⁹
- Despite popular notions, research has shown a link between frequent marijuana use and increased violent behavior.²⁰ Research found that among youth, the incidence of physically attacking people, destroying property and stealing increased in proportion to the number of days marijuana was smoked in the past year.²¹

Marijuana Impairs Driving

- Marijuana affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, many of the skills required for safe driving and other tasks. These effects can last several hours after smoking marijuana. Marijuana use can also make it difficult to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road.²²
- Research has provided more evidence of the prevalence of drugged driving and the resulting consequences. A roadside study of reckless drivers who were not impaired by alcohol showed that 45 percent tested positive for marijuana.²³ Another study of patients in a shock-trauma unit who had been in traffic accidents revealed that 15 percent of those who had been

driving a car or motorcycle had been smoking marijuana, and another 17 percent had both THC and alcohol in their blood.²⁴

Parents Can Make a Difference

- Parents are the most powerful influence on their kids when it comes to drugs. Two-thirds of youth ages 13-17 say losing their parents' respect is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.²⁵
- In 2000, only 7 percent of youths ages 12-17 who indicated that their "parents would strongly disapprove if they tried marijuana once or twice" had used an illicit drug in the past month. But 31 percent of youth whose parents did not strongly disapprove reported use of an illicit drug in the past month.²⁶

¹ National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 2001

² National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 2000

³ Monitoring the Future, 2002

⁴ National Institute on Drug Abuse, www.nida.nih.gov, Marijuana: Facts for Teens

⁵ "Treatment Episodes Data Set 1994-1999: National Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment Services," SAMHSA, October 2001

⁶ SAMHSA, TEDS, 2001. Fifty-seven percent of youth admissions were referrals through the court system.

⁷ "Cannabis Youth Treatment Randomized Field Experiment," preliminary report, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002

⁸ W. Hall, N. Solowij and J. Lemon. "The health and psychological consequences of cannabis use," (No. National Drug Strategy Monograph No. 25), Australian Government Publication Services, 1994. D.B. Kandel and M. Davis, Progression to regular marijuana involvement: Phenomenology and risk factors of near daily use. In M. Glantz & R. Pickens (Eds) *Vulnerability to drug abuse* (pp.221-253). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1992.

⁹ SAMHSA, TEDS, 2001.

¹⁰ Marijuana Potency Monitoring Project, University of Mississippi, quarterly report #78, May 9, 2002-August 8, 2002

¹¹ *Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know*, Revised, NIDA, November 1998

¹² NIDA InfoFax Marijuana 13551

¹³ Adolescents age 12 to 17 who smoke marijuana weekly are three times more likely to have thoughts about committing suicide. "Adolescent Self-Reported Behaviors and their Association with Marijuana Use," SAMHSA, 1998. Based on data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 1994-1996

¹⁴ NIDA InfoFax Marijuana 13551

¹⁵ Judith S. Brook, Elinor B. Balka and Martin Whiteman, "The risks for late adolescence of early adolescent marijuana use," *American Journal of Public Health*, October 1999

¹⁶ Marijuana Use Among Youths, The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse Report, July 19, 2002

¹⁷ NIDA InfoFax Marijuana 13551

¹⁸ Brook, et al., 1999

¹⁹ Adolescent Self-Reported Behaviors, SAMHSA, 1998

²⁰ Brook, et al., 1999

²¹ National Household Study on Drug Abuse, 1994-1996

²² *Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know*, Revised, NIDA, November 1998

²³ Dan Brookoff, et al., *New England Journal of Medicine*, 331:518-522, 1994.

²⁴ *Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know*, Revised, NIDA, November 1998

²⁵ Partnership for a Drug-Free America, "Partnership Attitude Tracking Study," 1999.

²⁶ National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 2000