

Youth and Marijuana

Heads Up About Its Effects Now – and Later



Marijuana is the most commonly used illegal drug by teens. While the majority of youth do not use marijuana (or alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, for that matter), the number who believe marijuana is harmless has increased over the past decade. This uptick may be due, in part, to more relaxed attitudes in response to legalization of marijuana across the nation. Regardless of reason, this no-harm perception does not align with reality: Marijuana use in any amount during adolescence is not known to be safe.¹

“Marijuana’s increasingly widespread availability in multiple and highly potent forms, coupled with a false and dangerous perception of safety among youth, merits a nationwide call to action.”

– VADM JEROME ADAMS, U.S. SURGEON GENERAL

Youth Use and Marijuana’s Effects

Young people who regularly use marijuana can experience broad and long-reaching effects. In fact, frequent use of marijuana during adolescence is associated with such short- and long-term health and social effects as:²

- Deficits in attention, memory, and motivation
- Increased absences and drop-out rates
- Declines in achievement and performance
- Impaired coordination, concentration, and reaction times
- Difficulties with thinking and problem-solving
- Increased risk of depression, anxiety, and attempted suicide
- Impaired learning in adolescents
- Chronic use is linked to declines in IQ
- Potential for addiction over time

Daily Use Increasing

For 45 years, the annual *Monitoring the Future* (MTF) drug and alcohol survey has measured the drug and alcohol habits and attitudes of students nationwide. Though statistics remained unchanged for many years, in 2019 the daily use of marijuana took a dramatic leap among 8th and 10th graders.³

1.3% daily marijuana use among 8th graders from 2018 to 2019 0.7% to 1.3%

4.8% daily marijuana use among 10th graders from 2018-2019 3.4% to 4.8%

6.4% daily marijuana use among 12th graders from 2018-2019 5.8% to 6.4%

Perception of Harm of regular use has continued to drop over a decade:

8th graders perception dropped from 2010 – 2019 68% to 51%

10th graders perception dropped from 2010 – 2019 57% to 39%

12th graders perception dropped from 2010 – 2019 47% to 30%

Does Age Really Make a Difference?

The short answer Yes. According to researchers with the National Drug & Alcohol Research Center (NDARC), the younger a person is when they start using cannabis – and the more frequently they use it – the more likely they are to experience cannabis-related harm.⁴

According to NDARC, some of the mental health and social consequences of early cannabis use for those who become daily users before the age of 17 include:

- 60% less likely to finish high school or get a degree
- 7X more likely to attempt suicide
- 18X more likely to develop cannabis dependence
- 8X likely to use other illicit drugs later in life

While much about the human brain is not fully understood, researchers do know it continues to develop until around the age of 25. This makes the adolescent brain especially vulnerable to the effects of addictive substances.¹ As such, preventing marijuana use in adolescence may be key, say researchers, to improving young people's functioning and lead to a better future, more options, and life satisfaction.⁴

About This Campaign

Because much of the public conversation surrounding marijuana has been based on anecdotes rather than science, Prevention Action Alliance and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services created this campaign to help people better understand the facts about marijuana and its effects.

If you found this article helpful, we encourage you to share it with others. You can also find other fact sheets about marijuana at: preventionactionalliance.org/marijuana

If you have concerns about your own use of marijuana or a loved one's, and wish to seek help, go to: findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

Contact Us

For more information about youth and marijuana, please contact us at:

Prevention Action Alliance
(614) 540-9985
preventionactionalliance.org

About Us

Prevention
Action Alliance



Prevention Action Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit located in Columbus, Ohio. We're dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Learn more at preventionactionalliance.org.

The mission of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) is to provide statewide leadership on the topics of mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery. Learn more about OhioMHAS at mha.ohio.gov.

1. hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html

2. cdc.gov/marijuana/factsheets/teens.htm

3. monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/mtf-vol1_2019.pdf

4. ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/blog/qa-dr-edmund-silins-about-cannabis-research