



Preventing Marijuana Use Among Youth & Young Adults





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The Drug Enforcement Administration's primary mission is to enforce the nation's federal drug laws. But DEA also has a responsibility to educate the public about the dangers and consequences of drug use based on facts and scientific evidence.

DEA is especially concerned about marijuana use and its negative consequences among youth and young adults. This publication provides an overview of marijuana use among this population; physical, academic, and social consequences; tips for how to get involved to prevent marijuana use among youth and young adults; and federal resources to assist in your efforts.

SCOPE OF THE ISSUE

Marijuana Use Among Youth and Young Adults in the United States

The percentage of students who reported using marijuana (in all forms, including smoking and vaping) within the past year decreased significantly for eighth, 10th, and 12th grade students.¹

- ✓ Eighth graders: 7.1% reported using marijuana in the past year in 2021, compared to 11.4% in 2020
- ✓ 10th graders: 17.3% reported using marijuana in the past year in 2021, compared to 28.0% in 2020
- ✓ 12th graders: 30.5% reported using marijuana in the past year in 2021, compared to 35.2% in 2020

Marijuana Use Among College Students and Other Young Adults

- Daily marijuana use increased in 2020 to an all-time high among U.S. college students over the past four decades.²
- In 2020, daily marijuana use increased to 7.9% among 19- to 22-year-old full-time college students, a significant increase of 3.3 percentage points over the past 5 years.²
- In 2020, 13% of young adults not in college used marijuana on a daily basis.²
- In 2020, 21% of young adults aged 19-22 perceived regular use of marijuana as carrying great risk of harm, the lowest level since 1980 when tracking of this age group began.²



Marijuana and Cannabis

People often use the words *cannabis* and *marijuana* interchangeably, but they don't mean exactly the same thing.

- Cannabis refers to all products derived from the plant *Cannabis Sativa L.* The cannabis plant contains over 550 chemical substances.³
- Marijuana means all parts of the plant *Cannabis Sativa L.*, whether growing or not; the seeds thereof; the resin extracted from any part of such plant; and every compound, manufacture, salt, derivative, mixture, or preparation of such plant, its seeds, or resin with more than 0.3% delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (delta-9 THC) on a dry weight basis.³
- A group of substances found in the cannabis plant fall under a class called cannabinoids (i.e., delta-9 THC).³

KNOW THE FACTS

Marijuana is addictive.

- Research suggests up to 30% of those who use marijuana may develop some degree of marijuana use disorder.⁴
- People who begin using marijuana before age 18 are four to seven times more likely than adults to develop a marijuana use disorder.⁴



Marijuana has short- and long-term effects on the brain.

- When marijuana is smoked, the mind-altering chemical THC quickly passes from the lungs into the bloodstream.⁴
- The blood then carries the chemical to the brain and other organs throughout the body.⁴
- The body absorbs THC more slowly when the person eats or drinks it. In that case, they generally feel the effects after 30 minutes to 1 hour.⁴
- When people begin using marijuana as teenagers, the drug may impair thinking, memory, and learning functions.⁴

Marijuana use can have a wide range of physical and mental effects.



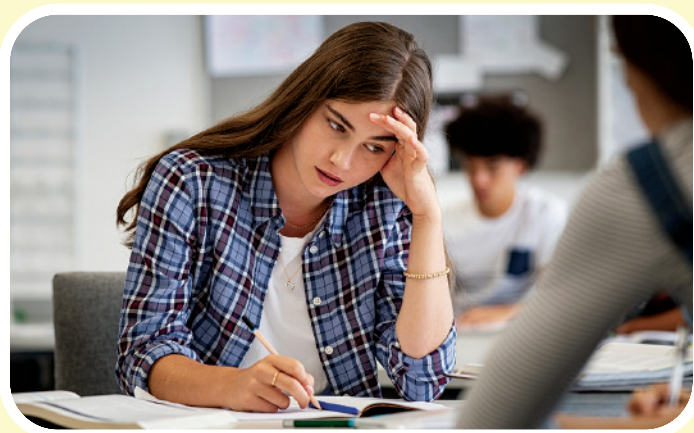
- Physical effects include breathing problems, increased heart rate, problems with child development during and after pregnancy; and intense nausea and vomiting.⁴
- Long-term marijuana use has been linked to mental illness in some people, such as temporary hallucinations, temporary paranoia, and worsening symptoms in patients with schizophrenia.⁴

Marijuana is unsafe if you are behind the wheel.

- Research shows that marijuana use affects skills required for safe driving, such as judgment, coordination, and reaction time.⁵
- Marijuana makes it hard to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road.⁵
- As with any psychoactive drug, impaired driving can cause deadly vehicle crashes.⁵



Marijuana is linked to problems in school.



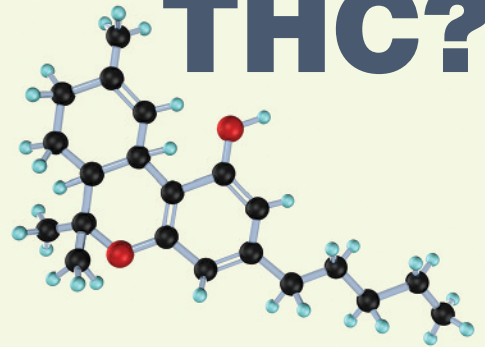
- Marijuana use affects attention, memory, and learning skills, which can last for days and sometimes weeks, depending on how often it is used.⁵
- Students who use marijuana are more likely not to finish high school or get a college degree, compared with their peers who don't use marijuana.⁵
- Marijuana also affects timing, movement, and coordination, which can harm athletic performance.⁵

Exposure to higher THC levels means a greater chance of a harmful reaction.



- Higher THC levels may explain the rise in emergency room visits involving marijuana use.⁷
- Marijuana can be mixed in food (i.e., edibles), such as brownies, cookies, or candy, or infused in a beverage. Edibles take longer to digest and produce a high, so people may consume more to feel the effects faster, leading to dangerous results.⁷
- Higher THC levels may mean a greater risk for addiction if people are regularly exposing themselves to high doses.⁷

What is THC?



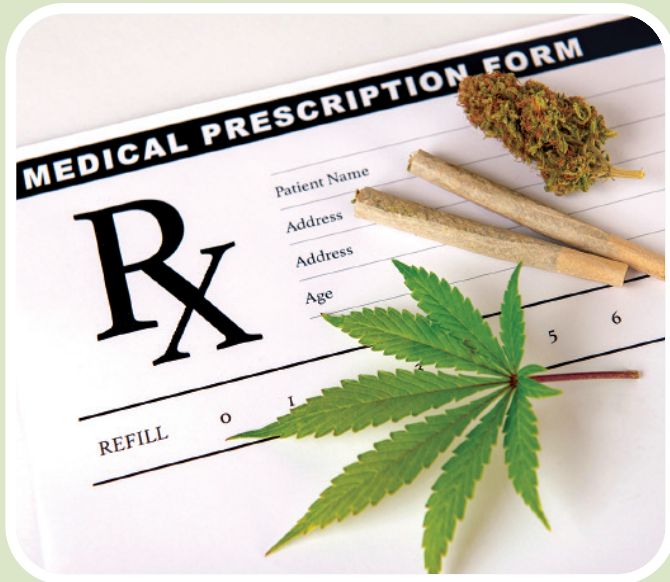
- THC is the main mind-altering chemical in marijuana.⁶
- Marijuana contains more than 500 chemicals, including more than 100 compounds that are similar to THC.⁶
- The amount of THC in marijuana determines its potency and how it can affect the body.⁶
- In 1995, the THC content in confiscated cannabis samples was approximately 4%; in 2019, it was more than 14%.⁶

“But It’s Legal Now, Right? No.”

- Federal law states that marijuana in any form (e.g., smoked or edible) is not legal for medical or recreational use.
- Under the Controlled Substances Act, marijuana is classified as a Schedule I drug, meaning it has:
 - ✓ no currently accepted medical use in the U.S.,
 - ✓ a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision, and
 - ✓ a high potential for abuse.



Marijuana as Medicine



- Whether smoking or otherwise consuming marijuana has therapeutic benefits that outweigh its health risks is still an open question that science has not resolved.⁸
- Although many states now permit dispensing marijuana for medicinal purposes and there is mounting anecdotal evidence for the efficacy of marijuana-derived compounds, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has not approved “medical marijuana.”⁸
- Two main cannabinoids from the marijuana plant are of medical interest –THC and CBD (cannabidiol).⁸



- THC itself has proven medical benefits in particular formulations. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved THC-based medications, dronabinol and nabilone, prescribed in pill form for the treatment of nausea in patients undergoing cancer chemotherapy and to stimulate appetite in patients with wasting syndrome due to AIDS.⁸
- Unlike THC, CBD doesn’t make people “high,” and it may be useful in reducing pain and inflammation and controlling epileptic seizures. In 2018, FDA approved a CBD-based liquid medication (Epidiolex®) for treatment of two forms of severe childhood epilepsy.⁸

Get Involved in Prevention



- **Red Ribbon Week** is an annual opportunity for youth and young adults, parents, teachers, educators, and community organizations to raise awareness about drug use and misuse. The nationwide campaign occurs annually on October 23-31. (www.dea.gov/redribbon)
- **The Red Ribbon Patch Program** provides Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts the opportunity to earn a patch from DEA by engaging in antidrug activities in celebration of Red Ribbon Week. (<https://go.usa.gov/xzSPa>)
- **National Drug & Alcohol Facts Week** is an annual health observance to share facts about drugs, alcohol, and addiction. (teens.drugabuse.gov/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week)
- **National Prevention Week** is a national public health platform bringing together communities and organizations to raise awareness about the importance of substance use prevention and positive mental health. (www.samhsa.gov/prevention-week)
- Join your school or community's antidrug coalition. If your school or community doesn't have a coalition, visit www.cadca.org to learn how to start one.

- Organize an information fair at your school to help raise awareness of the impact of drug use on individuals, families, and communities.
- Set up a program to help educate your peers or younger children about drug use and misuse. Being a mentor or role model for younger children can have a positive impact on them.

It's important to be up to date on drug facts and trends. Get information and training from local contacts and programs to help you in these areas.

Some potential resources include:

- DEA has a Demand Reduction Coordinator in each of its Field Divisions around the nation: www.dea.gov/divisions
- Several federal agencies have publications and other resources that are free of charge:
 - **DEA:** www.dea.gov/education-prevention/community-outreach
 - **National Institute on Drug Abuse:** nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/parents-educators
 - **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** www.samhsa.gov/find-help/prevention





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This publication was produced by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (www.dea.gov).

For more information, please e-mail community.outreach@dea.gov.

RESOURCES

www.justthinktwice.com

DEA's website for teens provides credible information about various drugs and harmful effects of drug use.

www.campusdrugprevention.gov

DEA's website for professionals working to prevent drug misuse among college students.

www.teens.drugabuse.gov

NIDA's trusted source for science-based information on teen drug use and its effects.

www.store.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA's brochure, *Tips for Teens: The Truth About Marijuana*, provides facts about marijuana, describes short- and long-term effects, and lists signs of marijuana.

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