Marijuana: Know the Truth Impacts of Legalization



Marijuana Potency

- Marijuana potency has risen from 4% in 1995 to 20% in 2015.¹ By 2017, marijuana strains found in Colorado dispensaries had THC content of between 17% to 28%.²
- New methods of processing marijuana have yielded extremely concentrated high potency extracts called wax, shatter, dabs, butane hash oil (BHO), also known as honey oil, with THC levels up to 95%.²

Mental Health Affects

- Recently, researchers found that any use of marijuana was associated with increased risk of self-reported psychotic disorders.⁶
- Marijuana stimulates the brain causing altered thinking, memory loss, brain development impairment, hallucinations, and psychosis.⁷
- Adolescents with heavy marijuana use lose an average of 8-10 IQ points.⁸
- Marijuana use was significantly associated with worse recovery for depression and anxiety symptoms and mental health functioning compared with patients not using marijuana.⁹
- A recent large study of adults ages 18-35 found that use of marijuana was strongly associated with suicidal ideation, suicide planning, and suicide attempt.
 Compared to non-users, researchers found that those reporting marijuana use were 1.4 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts, 1.6 times more likely to formulate a suicide plan, and 1.4 times more likely to attempt suicide.¹⁰

Marijuana and Opioid Use Vulnerability

- People who used marijuana were more than three times as likely to use any opioid and more than twice as likely to have a prescription opioid use disorder or to abuse prescription opioids than nonusers.¹¹
- There is little evidence that marijuana reduces pain or the use of opioids.¹²
- Marijuana use increases the likelihood of opioid dependence.¹³
- Early use of marijuana reduces reactivity of the brain's reward center in adulthood causing vulnerability to opioids and other drug addiction.^{14,15}
- Marijuana prepares the brain for heightened responses to other drugs.¹⁶

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Addiction

- 90% of all addictions start in adolescence.³
- 9% of people who try marijuana become addicted.^{4,5}
- Marijuana addiction is 17% (or 1 in 6) for those who start using as a teen.^{4,5}
- 20-50% of daily marijuana users become addicted.^{4,5}

Physical Health Effects

- Like tobacco, marijuana smoke irritates the lungs causing breathing difficulties, chronic coughing, bronchitis, and pneumonia.^{17,18}
- Marijuana use nearly doubles the risk of testicular cancer.¹⁹
- Regular, long-term marijuana use can lead to severe nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and dehydration called Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome, which may require emergency medical attention.²⁰

Pregnancy

- Marijuana use while pregnant can cause harm to the baby including low-birth weight, developmental problems, attention and learning difficulties²¹
- THC can be passed to the baby through breastmilk.²²
- Pregnant women who were heavy marijuana users had a much higher prevalence of poor medical and psychiatric outcomes compared to pregnant women who did not report such use.²²

Environment

- Devastating environmental impacts from marijuana cultivation include endangering native animals and their habitats, toxic waste run-off, deforestation, noise and light pollution, diversion of water resources, human waste and garbage littering.^{31,32}
- Marijuana cultivation uses a large amount of critical resources. In California, cultivation accounts for over \$5 billion worth of electricity usage annually.33

Marijuana plants use an average of 22.7

- liters of water per plant per day.³⁴ **Black Market**
- Despite the legalization of recreational marijuana in Colorado, black-market marijuana continues to thrive.²⁵
- Legalized medical marijuana is diverted to the black market through exploitation of state cultivation allowances and growers who sell to the illicit market rather than state licensed retailers.35

Educational Disruption

- Marijuana use is consistently associated with reduced educational attainment (e.g. grades and graduating).^{36,37}
- Chronic marijuana use results in impaired learning in adolescents and is linked to declines in IQ, school performance that jeopardizes professional and social achievements, and life satisfaction.³⁸
- Marijuana use is associated with increased rates of school absence and drop-out.³⁹

Driving Risks

- Since recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado, traffic deaths involving drivers who tested positive for marijuana more than doubled from 55 in 2013 to 131 people killed in 2020. This represents a 138% increase in marijuana-related traffic fatalities, while all Colorado traffic deaths increased by 29%.²⁵
- Five years after legalization of recreational marijuana, fatal-crash-involving drivers who are THC-positive has remained about double the level observed before legalization.⁴⁰
- An estimated 21% of all drivers involved in fatal crashes in Washington State in 2017 were THC-positive, higher than in any other year in the 10-year period examined.⁴³

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Access and Availability

- "Big Marijuana" is a lucrative global industry that has followed the "Big Tobacco" playbook through marketing their products to youth and downplaying harms.²³
- Marijuana dispensary density has been linked to an increase in youth use.24
- In states that have legalized marijuana, there was a 25% increase in risk for Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD) among youth aged 12 to 17 years.²⁵
- As marijuana users and growers increase in a community, consumption among youth also increases.²⁶
- More than 35% of high school seniors used marijuana in the past year.27
- In states where recreational marijuana is legal, youth perception of harm from smoking marijuana is lowest.²⁸
- Between 2017 and 2020, increases in past month vaped marijuana use were at least doubled for 8th, 10th, and 12th graders.29
- A recent study found that the college students' past-30-day use of marijuana escalated in states that had recreational marijuana legalization (RML) versus those in states that did not have RML.³⁰





