

Marijuana 101

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States. Legalization of marijuana for medical or recreational use in a growing number of states is affecting the perceptions of some teens regarding the safety and health of use. Concerns about teen use are real. Resources on drugabuse.gov and [articles](#) on the risks of marijuana use on the developing adolescent brain address many of the issues on parents' minds.

Here are a few points parents need to know.

Potency trend implications. The concentration of THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, is up. Way up. Published study data report that confiscated samples during a 30-year span show today's marijuana products have THC concentrations nearly 500% stronger potency on average from the 1970s. A dose is trial by error. A [2017 report](#) from Colorado since legalization disclosed quadrupled ER visits by teens testing positive for marijuana. Not surprisingly, teens face elevated risk on the road because use impairs driving for 6 hours or longer. A 2017 analysis in [The Denver Post](#) of National Traffic Highway Safety Administration data shows a 40 percent increase in fatal crashes in Colorado since recreational sales began in 2014. At the same time there has been a 147% increase in drivers testing positive for marijuana.

Why edibles are problematic. Marijuana in any form—dried, powdered, oil, wax—contains THC, and is smoked or vaped (e-cigarette form) as well as ingested as an ingredient in food or beverage. In 2017, Colorado banned sales of packaged marijuana gummy bears and other fun candy shapes appealing to children. These THC delivery forms don't correspond to familiar serving sizes. Without a clear sense of what constitutes a reasonable "dose," people consume more. It takes 90 minutes for metabolism to deliver the full effect of the psychoactive impact on the brain of edibles, versus 30 minutes for smoked. Teens ingest more while waiting for the drug to kick in. Excessive THC can immobilize a person for several hours. Where [data](#) are available, overdosing reports are higher in states with legal edibles. Teens who have made their own edibles, and shared them with friends who became ill, have faced legal consequences. Another issue is without purity enforcement, contaminants including pesticides, mold and even [mites](#) have been reported.

Percentage of teens using marijuana. Eighty-nine percent (9 in 10) of District 203 and 204 high school students reported anonymously they did not use marijuana (30-day data) on the 2016 Illinois Youth Survey. The number choosing to be marijuana-free has risen by 5% (84% to 89%) since 2009, contrary to misperceptions. Nationally in 2016, on two large anonymous surveys of those aged 12-18 years, 83% to 93% were marijuana-free in the past 30 days, a percentage slightly higher than the same data collected in 2013.

Marijuana's effects (can vary depending on a teen's social-emotional health).

Short-term:

Altered sensory perception; distorted sense of time, such as reacting slowly or delayed response in speech; changes in emotion such as euphoric or paranoia; impaired balance and coordination; difficulty with orienting thought, recall, and problem-solving; anxious/worried, panic; hallucination; psychosis.

Long-term:

When marijuana users begin using as teenagers, brain development can be altered resulting in increased impulsivity, and 1 in 6 becoming psychologically dependent on continued use. Studies show regular use is linked with depression, lowered IQ, and a wane in motivation in school, jobs, and goals, resulting in lower life satisfaction.

ILLINOIS LAW

2013

Illinois approves Act piloting medical cannabis for adults with [debilitating conditions](#) beginning in 2014.

2015

Illinois amendment adds use by children under 18 with consent of two physicians and a parent.

2016

Illinois Bill decriminalizes 10 grams of marijuana possession, reducing penalty to civil offense punishable with \$100-200 fine.

2017

Recreational possession over 10 grams, sales, and use remains illegal in Illinois; federal marijuana law bans possession, cultivation, and sales.

Parenting Tips:

- **Educate yourself and keep talking with your children.** Talk about how marijuana affects the developing brain, with evidence-based sites such as drugabuse.gov and [SAM: Smart Approaches to Marijuana](#), and books such as *The Teenage Brain* by Frances Jensen, MD.
- **Be a positive role model.** Live a healthy lifestyle. Honesty is respected by teens regarding family history of addiction, however, refrain from joking about marijuana use with tales of "back in the day."
- **Praise your teen for not using drugs.** Disapproval of marijuana use isn't the same as judging the character of marijuana users, so your teen may be more likely to open up and share with you about a friend's use.
- **Monitor who your teen is with, where they go, and enforce a curfew.** Make them aware that they can call you or text if they get in a situation and need help or "an excuse" to leave. Remind them never to ride in a car with someone who has consumed alcohol or marijuana—the danger is not only bodily harm, but arrest.
- **The parent who clearly expresses expectations to their child about behavior, values, rules, and laws is a caring parent.** By monitoring your teen with predictably enforced rules such as a consequence for breaking curfew, teens understand the structure.
- **Honor students, athletes, or other busy kids are not immune from risky behaviors, including substance use.** Having an adult present when they get home from school, or getting them involved in a healthy activity after school, is preventive. Teens have better outcomes—making healthy choices when faced with substance use—having an adult in their household who knows what's going on in their life. The active presence of a caring adult is protective.
- **Eat dinner together and discuss your teen's day, interest, dreams and goals.** Teens whose parent [talk to them about alcohol, tobacco & other drugs are less likely to use them](#). Listen, and they will talk.

The [Power of Choice](#) is a collaborative project led by 360 Youth Services in District 203 and 204 middle and high schools increasing the number of students making healthy choices regarding substance use.

Data collected since 2003 are evidence that The Power of Choice campaign has been reaching its goals. The true norm is most students make healthy choices most of the time.