

Quick Facts about the Risks to Youth if Marijuana is Legalized

Now May Not be the Time to Legalize Marijuana in Virginia

Parents, community leaders, elected officials and legislators are all weighing the pros and cons of legalizing marijuana. They are all no doubt panicked about marijuana getting into the hands of children, youth, and young adults either intentionally and unintentionally. Marijuana poses many short- and long-term medical, health, safety, cognitive, financial, academic, occupational, and family risks to adult users. The risks however are exacerbated when used by those under 21. The pandemic has severely disrupted the academic, social, family, emotional, and recreational aspects of youth in Virginia. Legislators and elected official should focus Virginian's covid and recession recovery on youth and families, not an ill-timed, ill-planned, misinformed legalization effort.

Is marijuana riskier for youth to use? Yes.

Marijuana use is harmful to developing brains. Youth use increases the risk of negative cognitive, academic, social, psychiatric, medical, and safety outcomes. One study found changes in adolescent brain development due to marijuana user at an early age [1]. Chronic marijuana use is associated with cognitive impairment and worsened academic performance [2]. Adolescent marijuana use is also associated with an increased risk for depression, suicidality [3], dependence and addiction. In fact, marijuana is the No. 1 reason adolescents are admitted to substance-abuse treatment in the U.S. (learnaboutsam.org).

Will legalization remove the “forbidden fruit” appeal and cause use rates to decrease? No.

In 2018, an estimated 3700 adolescents used marijuana for the first time each day whereas only about 1,400 adults initiated marijuana per day. Consistent with the pattern for cigarettes and alcohol use, the majority of people in 2018 who initiated marijuana use were aged 12-25 [3]. Near daily marijuana use among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders nationwide increased 26.3% from 2018 to 2019 [4].

Youth Cannabis Use Disorder in “legal” states grew by 25% following legalization (Cerde et. al., 2019).

Will youth acquire and use marijuana even if legislation prohibits its sale to them? Yes.

Youth continue to use marijuana although it's illegal in Virginia. Past year and past month marijuana use among 12 to 17 year-olds in “legal” states increased around 3.5%, each from 2016-2018. Past year and past month marijuana use among 18 to 25 year-olds increased nearly 4.4% each from 2016-2018. While 23.8% of 12 to 17 year-olds in “non-legal” states perceive a risk from smoking marijuana once a month, only 17.4% in “legal” states perceive such a risk [5]. Juvenile marijuana-related arrests increased 114% between the three years before and after marijuana legalization in Washington, DC [6].

Is marijuana vaped by young people? Yes

Young people report vaping marijuana in increasingly large numbers since such data was first recorded in 2017. For example, nationwide youth marijuana vaping increased in 8th and 10th graders by 63% and in 12th graders by 53% [4]. Studies show youth vaping of any substance increases the risk of future marijuana vaping, presenting another risk amid a youth vaping epidemic [7]. Of particular concern is the fact that marijuana vaping delivers more potent forms of marijuana through vaporized concentrates, which can contain as much as 99% THC.



Does marketing by the marijuana industry and others target youth? Yes.

Marijuana social media marketing increased in “legal” states [8]. One study found young people who are exposed to marijuana marketing on social media are five times more likely to use marijuana [9]. Offenses related to minors, such as sale to a minor, comprise more than one in six of all documented violations committed by “legal” marijuana companies in the state of Washington [10].

References

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| [1] Orr et. al., 2019. | [2] Schuster, et al., 2018. |
| [3] Silins et al., 2014; Gobbi et al., 2019. | [4] Monitoring the Future, 2019. |
| [5] National Survey on Drug Use and Health, SAMHSA, State Comparisons, 2019. | |
| [6] DC Metropolitan Police Department, 2018. | [7] Kowitt et. al., 2019. |
| [8] Whitehill et. al., 2019. | [9] Trangenstein et. al., 2019. |
| [10] Washington Liquor and Cannabis Board, 2019. | |

This flyer is the fifth in a series of six from the Community Coalitions of Virginia (CCoVA; <https://communitycoalitionsofva.com/>). The previous flyer covered marijuana and insurance. Please direct questions and comments to Dr. Mary Crozier, Immediate Past Chair of CCoVA and member of CCoVA’s Legislation Committee; mkcrozier@gmail.com

