

## Marijuana and Teens: Fact Sheet

Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug among America's youth.<sup>1</sup> Among kids who use drugs, approximately 60 percent use marijuana only.<sup>2</sup> Of the 14.6 million past month marijuana users in 2002, about one third, or 4.8 million persons, used it on 20 or more days in the past month.<sup>3</sup> Between 1991 and 2001, the percentage of 8th graders who used marijuana doubled from one in ten to one in five.<sup>4</sup> From 2001 to 2003, current marijuana use declined 11 percent. This is the first decline in youth drug use of such a magnitude in more than a decade.<sup>5</sup> Kids are using marijuana at an earlier age. In the late 1960s fewer than half of those using marijuana for the first time were under 18. By 2001, about two-thirds (67 percent) of marijuana users were younger than 18.<sup>6</sup>

### Marijuana is Addictive

- Research has now established that marijuana is addictive.<sup>7</sup> Each year, more teens enter treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illicit drugs combined.<sup>8</sup> Sixty percent of teens admitted to drug treatment cite marijuana as their primary substance of abuse.<sup>9</sup>
- Research also shows that marijuana use is three times more likely to lead to dependence among adolescents than among adults.<sup>10</sup>
- Research indicates that the earlier kids start using marijuana, the more likely they are to become dependent on this or other illicit drugs later in life.<sup>11</sup>
- The proportion of admissions for primary marijuana abuse increased from 6 percent in 1992 to 15 percent of admission to treatment in 2000. Almost half (46 percent) of the people admitted for marijuana were under 20 years old. Of those admitted for treatment for primary marijuana dependence, 56 percent had first used the drug by age 14, and 26 percent had begun by age 12.<sup>12</sup>

### Marijuana Hurts Young Bodies and Minds

- **The brain.** Smoking marijuana leads to some changes in the brain similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin and alcohol.<sup>13</sup>
- **Lung damage.** Regular marijuana users often develop breathing problems including chronic coughing and wheezing. Marijuana contains the same cancer-causing chemicals as tobacco. The amount of tar inhaled by marijuana smokers and the level of carbon monoxide absorbed by those who smoke marijuana, regardless of THC content, are three to five times greater than among tobacco smokers.<sup>14</sup>
- **Mental health.** For young users, marijuana can lead to increased anxiety, panic attacks, depression and other mental health problems.<sup>15</sup> For those already prone to depression or anxiety attacks, marijuana use may accelerate or exacerbate problems.

### Marijuana Affects Learning and Academic Achievement

- Researchers have found that heavy marijuana use impairs the ability of young people to concentrate and retain information.<sup>16</sup> Regular marijuana use has been shown to be associated with cognitive deficits<sup>17</sup> and poor academic performance.<sup>18</sup> This may be especially problematic during teens' peak learning years, when their brains are still developing.
- One study found an association between an increase in adolescent marijuana use and a decrease in the likelihood of attaining at least a high school education.<sup>19</sup>
- Research found that youths with an average grade of "D" or below were more than four times as likely to have used marijuana in the past year as youths who reported an average grade of "A."<sup>20</sup>
- Students who have smoked marijuana within the past year are more than twice as likely to cut class than those who did not smoke, while health problems associated with using marijuana can keep students from attending school due to illness.<sup>21</sup>

### **Marijuana Linked to Risky Behaviors**

- Research shows that kids who use marijuana in early adolescence are more likely to engage in risky behaviors that may put their futures in jeopardy, such as delinquency; having multiple sexual partners; perceiving drugs as not harmful; and having more friends who exhibit deviant behavior.<sup>22</sup>
- According to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, adolescents age 12 to 17 who use marijuana weekly are nine times more likely than non-users to experiment with other illegal drugs or alcohol, five times more likely to steal and nearly four times more likely to engage in violence.<sup>23</sup>
- Despite popular notions, research has shown a link between frequent marijuana use and increased violent behavior.<sup>24</sup> Research found that among youth, the incidence of physically attacking people, destroying property and stealing increased in proportion to the number of days marijuana was smoked in the past year.<sup>25</sup>
- In 2002, approximately 21 percent of youths (5 million) engaged in serious fighting at school or work, almost 16 percent (4 million) took part in a group-against-group fight, and almost 8 percent (2 million) attacked someone with the intent to seriously hurt them during the past year. Nearly 5 percent of youths (1.2 million) stole or tried to steal something worth more than \$50, more than 4 percent (1.1 million) sold illegal drugs, and more than 3 percent (800,000) carried a handgun during the past year. The percentages of youths engaging in delinquent behaviors in the past year rose with increasing frequency of marijuana use.<sup>26</sup>

### **Marijuana Impairs Driving**

- Marijuana affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, many of the skills required for safe driving and other tasks. These effects can last several hours after smoking marijuana. Marijuana use can also make it difficult to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road.<sup>27</sup>
- Research has provided more evidence of the prevalence of drugged driving and the resulting consequences. A roadside study of reckless drivers who were not impaired by alcohol showed that 33 percent tested positive for marijuana.<sup>28</sup> Another study of patients in a shock-trauma unit who had been in traffic crashes revealed that 15 percent of those who had been driving a car or motorcycle had been smoking marijuana and another 17 percent had both THC and alcohol in their blood.<sup>29</sup>

### **Parents Can Make a Difference**

- Parents are the most powerful influence on their kids when it comes to drugs. Two-thirds of youth ages 13-17 say losing their parents' respect is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.<sup>30</sup>
- In 2002, most youths (89.1 percent) reported that their parents would strongly disapprove of their trying marijuana once or twice. Among these youths, only 5.5 percent had used marijuana in the past month. However, among youths who perceived that their parents would only somewhat disapprove or neither approve nor disapprove of their trying marijuana, 30.2 percent reported past month use of marijuana.<sup>31</sup>

**Source:** [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com) (December 2004)