



IMPACTS OF LEGALIZATION

INCREASED MARIJUANA USE

Recreational marijuana laws lead to increased new use and weekly usage among both youth and adults.^{1,2}

The 2022 United Nation's World Drug Report stated that legalization of marijuana has led to a notable increase in use, especially among young adults, due to reduced perceived risk and stigma.³

States with recreational marijuana laws generally have higher rates of Cannabis Use Disorder (addiction to marijuana).⁴

POTENCY

Marijuana potency has increased from an average of 4% in 1995 to over 15% today.^{5,6}

In states with recreational marijuana laws, potency is much higher, ranging from around 16% THC (cannabis/marijuana flower) to 95% THC (concentrated products).⁷

New methods of processing marijuana have yielded extremely concentrated high potency extracts called wax, shatter, dabs, butane hash oil (BHO), or honey oil, with THC levels of up to 95%. These newer extracts are often used with vaporizers (vapes), especially by youth.⁸

MARIJUANA/CANNABIS USE DISORDER (ADDICTION)

9% of people who try marijuana may become addicted at some point in their life.⁹

30% of marijuana users may develop some degree of Cannabis Use Disorder.^{10,11}

MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS

Marijuana stimulates the brain, leading to altered thinking, memory issues, impaired brain development, hallucinations, and psychosis.¹²

Researchers find that any use of marijuana is associated with increased risk of self-reported psychotic disorders.¹³

Marijuana use is linked to poorer recovery outcomes for depression and anxiety symptoms, as well as mental health functioning.¹⁴

Marijuana use among adults 18-35 has been linked to higher rates of suicidal thoughts, planning, and attempts.¹⁵

PHYSICAL HEALTH EFFECTS

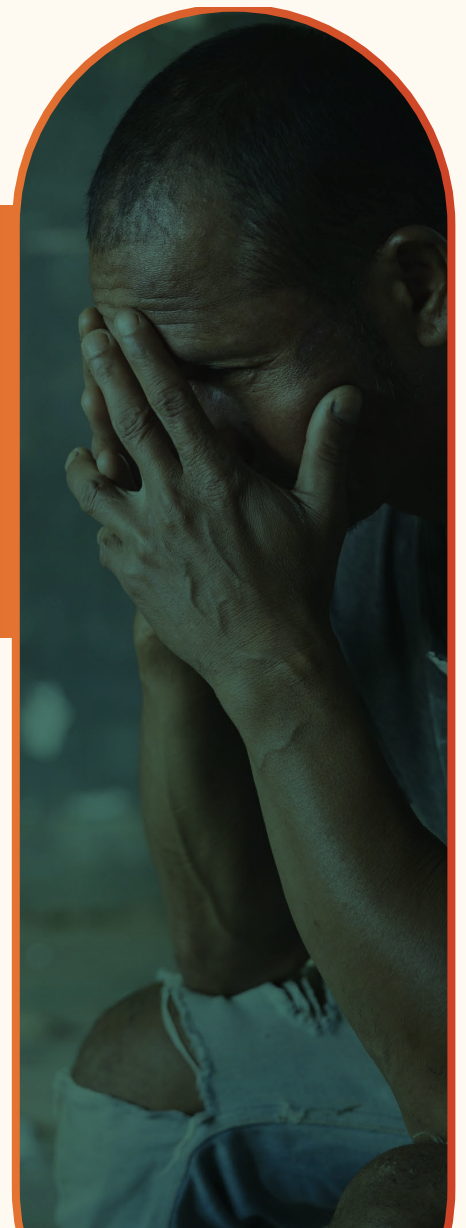
Like tobacco, marijuana smoke irritates the lungs causing breathing difficulties, chronic coughing, bronchitis, and pneumonia.¹⁶

Marijuana use nearly doubles the risk of testicular cancer.¹⁷

Regular, long-term marijuana use can lead to severe nausea, vomiting, and dehydration called Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome which may require medical attention.¹⁸

Since the legalization of recreational marijuana, Colorado has seen a significant rise in vomiting-related healthcare encounters.^{19,20}

Emergency room visits and admissions related to marijuana abuse in California increased by 89% after recreational marijuana laws were enacted; marijuana-related hospitalizations in Colorado surged by 148%.²¹



OTHER DRUG USE AND THE OPIOID CRISIS

Marijuana prepares the brain for heightened responses to other drugs, also causing vulnerability to other drug addictions.^{22,23}

An estimated 44.7% of lifetime marijuana users also use other drugs.²⁴

There is little evidence that marijuana reduces pain or the use of opioids.²⁵

Marijuana use increases the likelihood of opioid dependence.²⁶

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 of abusing prescription opioids than nonusers.²⁷

The legalization of marijuana appears to be linked to exacerbating the opioid crisis in the United States. By 2019, the death rates from all opioids and fentanyl were 44% and 50% higher, respectively, in areas where marijuana had been legalized compared to those where it had not.²⁸



MARIJUANA AND PREGNANCY

THC (the main psychoactive compound in marijuana) passes through the placenta during pregnancy and can be passed to the baby through breastmilk.²⁹

Using marijuana during pregnancy can harm the baby, leading to issues such as low birth weight, developmental problems, and difficulties with attention and learning.³⁰

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.²⁹

In Colorado, there was a more than two-fold increase in marijuana-involved pregnancy hospitalizations between 2011 and 2018. This increase was highest after the sale of recreational marijuana began in 2014.²⁰

Even paternal marijuana use can have adverse effects on outcomes for babies.³¹

ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY

“Big Marijuana” is a lucrative global industry that has followed the “Big Tobacco” playbook, by marketing their products to youth and downplaying harms.³²

Marijuana is broadly available and cultivated in every U.S. state.³³

Marijuana dispensary density has been linked to an increase in youth use.³⁴

A study found that college students’ past 30-day use of marijuana escalated in states that had recreational marijuana legalization, compared to those in states that do not.³⁵

DRIVING

Legalization of the recreational use of marijuana was associated with a 6.5% increase in injury crash rates and a 2.3% increase in fatal crash rates.³⁶

Since recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado, traffic deaths involving drivers who tested positive for marijuana increased by 138% from 2013 to 2020, while all Colorado traffic deaths increased by 29%.³²

More than five years after the legalization of recreational marijuana in Washington, fatal-crash-involved drivers who are THC-positive are about double the level observed before legalization.³⁷



IMPACT ON YOUTH

90% of all addictions start in adolescence.³⁸

People who begin using marijuana before the age of 18 are four to seven times more likely to develop Cannabis Use Disorder (addiction).³⁹

Marijuana use is consistently associated with reduced educational attainment (e.g. grades and graduating) and increased school absences and dropouts.⁴⁰

Chronic marijuana use results in impaired learning in adolescents and is linked to declines in IQ (8-10 points on average), school performance, and life satisfaction.³⁸

About 31% of high school seniors used marijuana in the past year.⁴¹

In states that have legalized marijuana, there was a 25% increase in risk for Cannabis Use Disorder among youth aged 12 to 17 years.⁴

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Legalization increases unintentional pediatric marijuana exposure, leading to poisonings in children.⁴²

From 2017 to 2021, there was a 1,375% increase in cases of marijuana edible poisonings among children under the age of 6.⁴³

In Washington, hospitalizations for unintentional pediatric marijuana exposure (for kids under 9) increased after legalization, with 81% occurring within a 2.5-year period after the legalization of recreational marijuana. Over 80% of exposures occurred within the home.⁴⁴

WORKPLACE

States with recreational marijuana laws saw a 10% increase in workplace injuries among individuals aged 20 to 34 years.⁴⁵

Approximately 1/3 of employees have observed usage of marijuana during work hours.⁴⁶

Many states have changed their laws regarding pre-hire testing for marijuana and its components, so it is likely that more people are working while using the drug. Around half of companies that eliminated THC testing report an increase in incidents or other workplace performance concerns.⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸

Marijuana cultivation uses a large amount of critical resources. In California, cultivation accounts for over \$5 billion worth of electricity usage annually.⁴⁹

Marijuana plants use an average of 227 liters per plant per day.⁵⁰



