

Get the Facts About Marijuana

Adolescent Marijuana Use

The effects of marijuana on growing brains



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marijuana.dhss.alaska.gov

Adolescent Marijuana Use

Marijuana is now legal in Alaska for people ages 21 and older, but that doesn't mean it's safe for young people to use. Research shows that using marijuana at an early age and for long periods of time may lead to serious problems like addiction, mental health issues, learning challenges and dropping out of school.^{1,2,3}

Risks of Marijuana Use During Adolescence

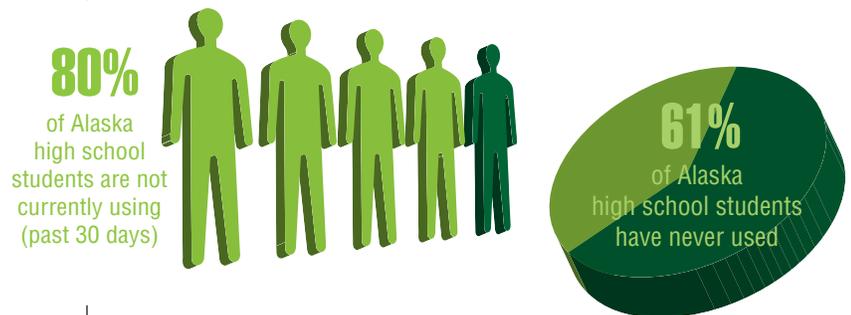
- Brain development is not complete until people are in their 20s.^{3,4} Using marijuana at a young age may lead to adverse changes in brain development.³
- Young people who use marijuana regularly may have a harder time learning and remembering things, and marijuana use has been associated with poorer academic performance and a higher risk of dropping out of school.^{1,4}
- Marijuana can be addictive, and people who start using it at a young age are at higher risk for addiction than people who start using it in adulthood.^{1,3,5,6} In 2013, nearly 4.2 million people ages 12 and older in the United States had a marijuana abuse or addiction problem.¹
- Marijuana use interferes with judgment, which can result in a greater chance of engaging in risky behaviors and experiencing their negative consequences, such as acquiring a sexually transmitted infection, driving while intoxicated, or riding with someone else who is intoxicated.¹ After alcohol, marijuana is the drug most often linked to car accidents.¹ Marijuana affects the skills required to drive safely such as alertness, concentration, coordination and reaction time.¹

- Young people who use marijuana may be at increased risk for mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression; this is especially true for adolescents with a family history of mental illness.^{1,4}

Myths About Adolescent Marijuana Use

Myth: Almost everyone uses marijuana.

Fact: In 2013, four out of five (80%) high school students in Alaska reported that they were NOT currently using marijuana and 61% reported that they had NEVER used marijuana.⁷



Myth: Because marijuana is natural, it's not harmful.

Fact: Marijuana—like tobacco and some other natural plants—can be harmful, especially when people start using at a young age.^{1,3,8} Levels of THC—the active ingredient in marijuana—have risen over the past 10 years, increasing the health risks associated with marijuana use.^{1,3,8}

Myth: Most young people won't openly talk to their parents about marijuana use.

Fact: Most young people care about what their parents say. A key reason young people choose NOT to use marijuana is because they know their parents don't approve of it.^{5,8}



Tips to Help Prevent Youth Marijuana Use ^{4,5,8}

- Set clear rules and expectations.
- Stay involved in your child's social life at home and in school by talking with them often.
- Start conversations early, before their teenage years. Ask what they have heard about using marijuana. Listen carefully, pay attention and do not interrupt. Avoid making negative or angry comments. Tell them the fact that most Alaska teens don't use marijuana.
- Coach your child on ways to say no to marijuana, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.
- Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviors and how they might affect your child's decisions regarding marijuana and other substance use.
- For more information about each of these tips, please review the booklet by Seattle Children's Hospital, "A parent's guide to preventing underage marijuana use." The booklet is available at <http://learnaboutmarijuanawa.org/parentpreventionbooklet2014.pdf>

Where can I find help?

- Marijuana addiction treatment resources are available in Alaska. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has staff ready to assist people in finding drug abuse treatment options close to their home.
 - o SAMHSA's 24/7 Treatment Referral Line: 800-662-HELP (4357)
 - o SAMHSA's Treatment Resources Website: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- Visit www.marijuana.dhss.alaska.gov for more information on health risks of using marijuana.

Reference List:

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3. Volkow, ND, et al. Adverse Health Effects of Marijuana. Use. N Engl J Med 2014 Jun; 370:2219-2227.
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6. Chen CY, Storr CL, Anthony JC. Early onset drug use and risk for drug dependence problems. Addict Behav 2009;34:319-22. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2677076/pdf/nihms91613.pdf>
7. Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Pages/yrbs/yrbsresults.aspx>
8. SAMHSA tools to help practitioners prevent youth marijuana use in their states and communities: <http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/new-suite-capt-tools-target-youth-marijuana-use>
Additional resource: http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Director/Documents/marijuana/Monitoring_Health_Concerns_Related_to_Marijuana_in_Colorado_2014.pdf