



# Preventing Cannabis Use Among Youth and Young Adults



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The Drug Enforcement Administration's primary mission is to enforce the nation's federal drug laws. But DEA also has a responsibility to educate the public about the dangers and consequences of drug use based on facts and scientific evidence.

DEA is especially concerned about cannabis use and its negative consequences among youth and young adults. This publication provides an overview of cannabis use among this population; physical, academic, and social consequences; tips for how to get involved to prevent cannabis use among youth and young adults; and federal resources to assist in your efforts.

## SCOPE OF THE ISSUE

### Cannabis Use Among Youth in the United States



The percentage of students who reported using cannabis remains substantial for eighth, 10th, and 12th grade students.<sup>1</sup>

- Eighth graders: 8.3% reported using marijuana in 2023
- 10th graders: 17.8% reported using marijuana in 2023
- 12th graders: 29% reported using marijuana in 2023

### Cannabis Use Among College Students and Other Young Adults

- In 2023, nearly one in 16 college students (6.3%) used cannabis on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2023, 11.6% of young adults not in college used cannabis on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup>
- Between 2018 and 2023, the percentage of full-time college students (ages 19-22) who vaped cannabis at least once in the past 30 days increased from 10% to 14%.<sup>2</sup>

# Marijuana and Cannabis

People often use the words *cannabis* and *marijuana* interchangeably, but they don't mean exactly the same thing. In this publication, DEA uses the word as indicated in the literature cited.



- Cannabis refers to all products derived from the plant *Cannabis Sativa L.* The cannabis plant contains approximately 540 chemical substances.<sup>3</sup>
- Marijuana means all parts of the plant *Cannabis Sativa L.*, whether growing or not; the seeds thereof; the resin extracted from any part of such plant; and every

- compound, manufacture, salt, derivative, mixture, or preparation of such plant, its seeds, or resin with more than 0.3% delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (delta-9 THC) on a dry weight basis.<sup>3</sup>
- A group of substances found in the cannabis plant fall under a class called cannabinoids (e.g., THC, cannabidiol [CBD]).<sup>3</sup>

## KNOW THE FACTS

### Cannabis is addictive.

- Studies have estimated that 22-30% of those who use cannabis may have a cannabis use disorder.<sup>4</sup>
- The strongest predictor of cannabis use disorder is how often someone uses it, but other factors such as family history of drug use also play a role.<sup>4</sup>

### Cannabis has short- and long-term effects on the brain.

- Many people use cannabis to get high. Cannabis can also cause altered time perception.<sup>4</sup>
- Frequent cannabis use has been linked to cognitive problems, such as learning, memory, and attention.<sup>4</sup>
- Research has also shown an increased risk of depression in people who use cannabis during adolescence.<sup>4</sup>
- Research has also linked cannabis use with suicidal thoughts and behaviors among teens.<sup>4</sup>



# Cannabis use can have a wide range of physical and mental effects.

- Physical effects include breathing problems, increased heart rate, problems with child development during and after pregnancy; and intense nausea and vomiting.<sup>4</sup>
- Some evidence has linked cannabis use to earlier onset of psychosis in people with genetic risk factors for psychotic disorders. The connection between heavy cannabis use and schizophrenia has been found to be especially strong in young males.<sup>4</sup>



## Using marijuana is unsafe if you are behind the wheel.

- There are many misconceptions about marijuana use, including that marijuana cannot impair you or that marijuana use can actually make you a safe driver. Several scientific studies indicate this is false.<sup>5</sup>
- Research shows that marijuana impairs motor skills, lane tracking, and cognitive functions.<sup>5</sup>
- THC in marijuana also hurts a driver's ability to multitask, a critical skill behind the wheel.<sup>5</sup>

## Cannabis use is linked to problems in school.

- Studies show that regular, heavy cannabis use in adolescence has a negative impact on memory and academic functioning.<sup>4</sup>
- It is also associated with negative effects on educational attainment in young adulthood.<sup>4</sup>

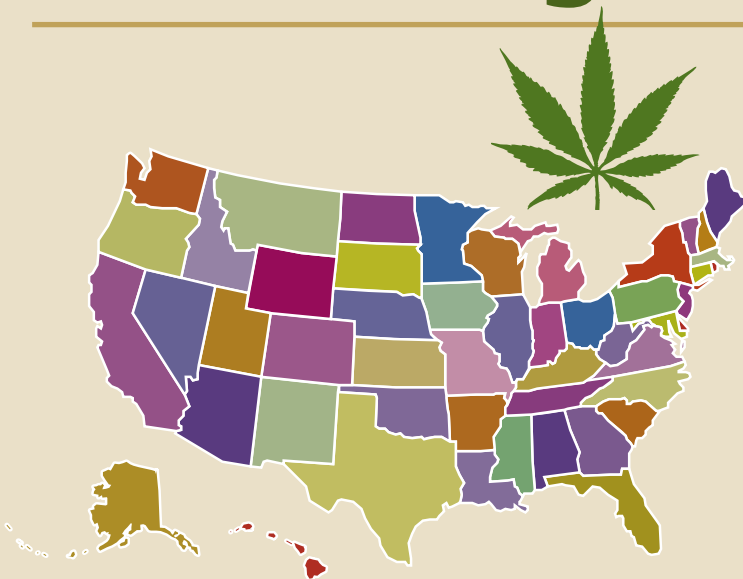


# Exposure to higher THC levels means a greater chance of a harmful reaction.

- Delta-9 THC is the main mind-altering chemical in cannabis.<sup>6</sup>
- The amount of delta-9 THC in cannabis has been increasing steadily over the past few decades. In 1995, the delta-9 THC content in confiscated cannabis samples was approximately 4%; in 2022, it was more than 16%.<sup>6</sup>
- Cannabis can be mixed in food (i.e., edibles), such as baked goods, candy, and drinks. Edibles take longer to digest and produce a high, so people may consume more to feel the effects faster, leading to dangerous results.<sup>6</sup>
- Higher THC concentrations have been associated with a greater likelihood of cannabis use progressing to cannabis use disorder.<sup>6</sup>

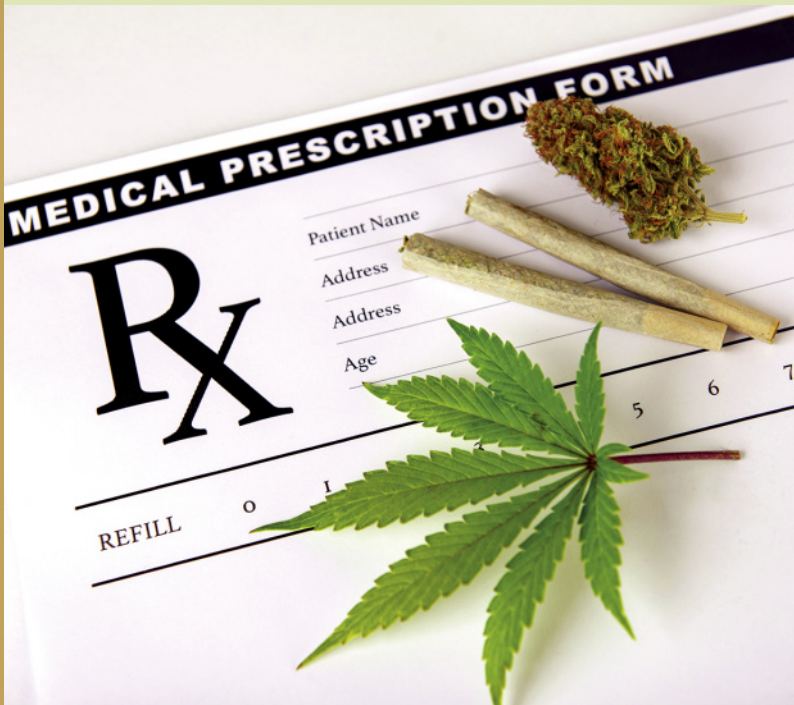


## “But It’s Legal Now, Right? No.”



- Federal law states that marijuana in any form (e.g., smoked or edible) is not legal for medical or recreational use.
- Under the Controlled Substances Act, marijuana is classified as a Schedule I drug, meaning it has:
  - ✓ no currently accepted medical use in the U.S.,
  - ✓ a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision, and
  - ✓ a high potential for abuse.

# Marijuana (Cannabis) as Medicine



- Scientists are still learning the ways that cannabis may help or harm people. For example, smoked cannabis may damage your lungs and respiratory system.<sup>7</sup>
- Research on the medical use of cannabis is still in early stages, and a lot remains unknown about the plant and how it interacts with the body.<sup>7</sup>
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved one plant-based cannabis drug (Epidiolex) for treating seizures associated with two rare and severe forms of epilepsy, as well as seizures associated with a rare genetic disorder that causes benign tumors to form in many parts of the body.<sup>7</sup>
- FDA has also approved two medicines (dronabinol and nabilone) made from a synthetic or lab-made chemical that mimics THC. These medicines are used to treat nausea in patients with cancer who are having chemotherapy treatment and to increase appetite in individuals with AIDS who do not feel like eating.<sup>7</sup>



# Get Involved in Prevention



- **Red Ribbon Week** is an annual opportunity for youth and young adults, parents, teachers, educators, and community organizations to raise awareness about drug use and misuse. The nationwide campaign occurs annually on October 23-31. ([www.dea.gov/redribbon](http://www.dea.gov/redribbon))
- **The Red Ribbon Patch Program** provides Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts the opportunity to earn a patch from DEA by engaging in antidrug activities in celebration of Red Ribbon Week. (<https://go.usa.gov/xzSPa>)
- **National Drug & Alcohol Facts Week** is an annual health observance to share facts about drugs, alcohol, and addiction in your community. (<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week>)
- **National Prevention Week** is a public education platform showcasing the work of communities and organizations across the country that are preventing substance use and promoting positive mental health. ([www.samhsa.gov/prevention-week](http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention-week))
- Join your school's or community's antidrug coalition. If your school or community doesn't have a coalition, visit [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org) to learn how to start one.

- Organize an information fair at your school to help raise awareness of the impact of drug use on individuals, families, and communities.
- Set up a program to help educate your peers or younger children about drug use and misuse. Being a mentor or role model for younger children can have a positive impact on them.

**It's important to be up to date on drug facts and trends. Get information and training from local contacts and programs to help you in these areas.**

## **Some potential resources include:**

- DEA has a Community Outreach Specialist in each of its field divisions around the nation: [www.dea.gov/divisions](http://www.dea.gov/divisions)
- Several federal agencies have publications and other resources that are free of charge:
  - **DEA:** [www.dea.gov/education-prevention/community-outreach](http://www.dea.gov/education-prevention/community-outreach)
  - **National Institute on Drug Abuse:** [nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/parents-educators](http://nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/parents-educators)
  - **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** [www.samhsa.gov/find-help/prevention](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/prevention)





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This publication was produced by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ([www.dea.gov](http://www.dea.gov)).

For more information, please e-mail [community.outreach@dea.gov](mailto:community.outreach@dea.gov).

## RESOURCES

### [www.justthinktwice.com](http://www.justthinktwice.com)

DEA's website for teens provides information about various drugs and harmful effects of drug use.

### [www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com](http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com)

DEA's website for parents, other caregivers, and educators to help identify drug use, drug paraphernalia, and resources to help raise drug-free children.

### [www.campusdrugprevention.gov](http://www.campusdrugprevention.gov)

DEA's website for professionals working to prevent drug use and misuse among college students.

### [www.operationprevention.com/ multi-drug-exploratory](http://www.operationprevention.com/multi-drug-exploratory)

DEA's digital resources that provide educators with interactive drug education tools that are aligned to national health and science standards.

### [www.store.samhsa.gov](http://www.store.samhsa.gov)

SAMHSA's evidence-based resource guide, *Preventing Marijuana Use Among Youth*, reviews the literature on prevention of marijuana use among youth, distills the research into recommendations for practice, and provides examples of the ways these recommendations can be implemented.

## SOURCES

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