



Teen Marijuana Use Does Not Increase Following Marijuana Policy Reforms

Study after study has concluded that marijuana policy reform is not linked to increased rates of marijuana use among teens. As National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Nora Volkow said at a March 23, 2022 Senate Health, Education Labor & Pensions Committee hearing, “in the United States, legalization by some states of marijuana has not been associated with an increase in adolescents’ marijuana use.”

In July 2019, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a major report analyzing federal data from more than 1.4 million high school students.¹ The researchers found no significant associations between the enactment of adult-use legalization laws and marijuana use or frequency of use among high school students. The study also looked at medical cannabis laws and concluded they had no impact on youth marijuana use. These findings were consistent with the results of a meta-analysis of 55 academic papers and multiple data sources published by the journal *Current Addiction Reports* in September 2018. Those researchers wrote that, “Liberal forms of medical cannabis regulation... have not to date increased rates of cannabis use among adolescents.”²

Released in February 2023, results from the most recent national survey of high schoolers conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that past 30-day use of cannabis among U.S. students in 2021 was the lowest rate since 1991.³

In 2012, Colorado and Washington became the first states to legalize marijuana for adult use. Both have conducted large-scale surveys involving tens of thousands of high school students in the years since. In each case, the results (see below) show an overall *reduction* in past 30-day marijuana use among teens. Research published in the journal *Substance Abuse* also suggests that legalization has not increased use among teens who were already using marijuana.

Available data suggests that regulating marijuana for adults’ use does not impact marijuana use among youth. Below are data tables for youth surveys comparing past 30-day marijuana use for teens before and after adult-use legalization laws passed in the more mature 10 legalization states — Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont, and Michigan⁴. In five of the states, government surveys through 2019 indicate a slight decrease in teens’ marijuana use rates, while in the other half, surveys suggest a slight increase. In most cases, the changes were within the confidence intervals. Taken as a whole, rates were unchanged. Meanwhile, two nationwide surveys show a modest decrease in teen use since states began legalizing cannabis for adults.

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2012⁵

2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2021
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8th grade	9.5%	9.4%	7.3%	6.4%	7.0%	2.8%
10th grade	20.0%	19.3%	18.1%	17.2%	17.9%	7.2%
12th grade	26.3%	26.7%	26.7%	26.4%	26.2%	15.9%

Colorado Healthy Kids Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in November 2012 ⁶

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2020
9th - 12th grade	22.0%	19.7%	21.2%	19.4%	20.6%	13.3%

Oregon Healthy Teens Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in November 2014 ⁷

	2013	2015	2017	2019	2020
8th grade	9.7%	8.8%	6.7%	7.8%	3.3%
11th grade	20.9%	19.1%	20.9%	20.4%	13.5%

Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in November 2014 ⁸

	2013	2015	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	19.7%	19.0%	21.5%	21.5%

California Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in November 2016 ⁹

	2015	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	22.9%	21.8%	17.1%

Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in November 2016 ¹⁰

	2015	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	24.5%	24.1%	26.0%

Maine Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in November 2016 ¹¹

	2015	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	19.9%	18.8%	22.3%

Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2016 ¹²

	2015	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	19.3%	17.9%	19.8%

Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in January 2018 ¹³

	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	23.5%	26.5%

Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2018

¹⁴

	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	23.7%	26.5%

National Survey on Drug Use and Health (past 30-day use, small sample size) ¹⁵

	'12-'13	'13-'14	'14-'15	'15-'16	'16-'17	'17-'18	'18-'19
U.S., 12-17 years old	7.2%	7.2%	7.2%	6.8%	6.5%	6.6%	7.0%
Colorado, 12-17 years old	11.2%	12.6%	11.1%	9.1%	9.0%	9.4%	9.8%
Washington, 12-17 years old	9.8%	10.1%	9.2%	7.9%	9.0%	9.9%	9.9%
Alaska, 12-17 years old	N/A	9.2%	10.6%	10.4%	8.8%	7.9%	8.5%
Oregon, 12-17 years old	N/A	10.2%	9.4%	9.8%	10.4%	9.7%	10.7%
D.C., 12-17 years old	N/A	10.6%	8.9%	8.1%	8.3%	8.5%	9.0%

Nevada, 12-17 years old	N/A	N/A	N/A	8.7%	8.8%	9.2%	9.7%
Maine, 12-17 years old	N/A	N/A	N/A	9.7%	9.9%	10.3%	10.9%
California, 12-17 years old	N/A	N/A	N/A	7.3%	6.9%	7.1%	8.9%
Massachusetts, 12-17 years old	N/A	N/A	N/A	8.7%	8.9%	9.3%	9.7%
Michigan, 12-17 years old	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7.9%	7.4%

Nationwide Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) ¹⁶

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
9th - 12th grade	23.1%	23.4%	21.7%	19.8%	21.7%

1 Association of Marijuana Legalization With Marijuana Use Among US High School Students, 1993-2019” September 2021

2 Leung, Janni, et al. “Has the Legalisation of Medical and Recreational Cannabis Use in the USA Affected the Prevalence of Cannabis Use and Cannabis Use Disorders?,” Current Addiction Reports, September 2018.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary and Trends Report,” February 2023, p. 22.; “Trends in the Prevalence of Marijuana, Cocaine, and Other Illegal Drug Use National YRBS: 1991—2019,” CDC. The last, pre-COVID national figure on current teen cannabis use (21.7% in 2019) was slightly lower than the rate before any state legalized cannabis for adults’ use (23.1% in 2011).

4 Eleven additional states — Illinois, Montana, Arizona, Virginia, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Missouri, and Maryland — have legalized marijuana for adults since 2019 and do not yet have “after” data or after “after” data that is likely significantly impacted by COVID.

5 Accessed here: <http://www.askhys.net/FactSheets> Likely due to disruptions in education due to the coronavirus, the survey was not conducted in 2020. The next survey, the Healthy Youth Survey, will be administered in October 2021.

6 Accessed here:

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BirthDeathCertificates/Surveys/OregonHealthyTeens/Pages/index.aspx>

7 Accessed here: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/results.htm>

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Accessed here: <https://pdas.samhsa.gov/saes/state> (N/A is listed for pre-legalization years)

15 Accessed here: <https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Results.aspx?>