



Do Medical Cannabis Laws Increase Teen’s Cannabis Use?

Since states first began considering medical cannabis laws, claims have frequently been made that the laws “send the wrong message” to adolescents, causing their cannabis use to increase. Now, more than 25 years since the passage of the nation’s first effective state medical cannabis law, a considerable body of data has found that those fears were not warranted.

Thirty-seven states and Washington, D.C. now have effective medical cannabis laws.¹ In 32 of the states, government surveys have produced before-and-after data on teens’ cannabis use. In 23 states, the data indicates overall decreases, 11 of which were outside confidence intervals. Only a single state’s data indicates an increase outside of the confidence interval. Other researchers and health experts have examined the data in recent years and have also found the data to be reassuring. As an exhaustive 2019 study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* concluded, “Consistent with the results of previous researchers, there was no evidence that the legalization of medical marijuana encourages marijuana use among youth.”² In a 2021 follow-up, the researchers found, “In the fully adjusted models, [medical marijuana law] adoption also was not associated with current marijuana use or frequent marijuana use.”³

Below is a review of the most comprehensive data on teens’ current (past 30 day) cannabis use in each of medical cannabis states. In all states where such data is available, rates are presented for all high schoolers. In states where data is not available, this uses data from the oldest grade with before-and-after data.

State	Pre-Law Current Use Rates	Most Recent Use Rates	Trend?	Data Source
California (1996)	25.9% (11 th graders, 1995/1996)	18.1% (11 th graders, 2019)	decrease (within confidence interval; changed survey)	California Student Survey and the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)
Alaska (1998)	28.7% (1995)	21.5% (2019)	decrease	The CDC’s YRBSS
Oregon (1998)	21% (11 th graders, 1998)	20.4% (11 th graders, 2019)	decrease (within confidence interval; changed survey)	Oregon Public Schools Drug Use Survey and Oregon Healthy Teens

¹ Twelve additional states have some other type of law that acknowledges the medical benefits of at least certain strains and preparations of cannabis. Only three of them have workable systems for in-state access.

² Anderson DM, Hansen B, Rees DI, Sabia JJ. “Association of Marijuana Laws With Teen Marijuana Use: New Estimates From the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys,” *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2019;173(9):879–881.

³ Anderson DM, et al. Association of Marijuana Legalization With Marijuana Use Among US High School Students, 1993-2019. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(9):e2124638. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.24638

State	Pre-Law Current Use Rates	Most Recent Use Rates	Trend?	Data Source
Washington (1998)	28.7% (12 th graders, 1998)	15.9% (12 th graders, 2021)	decrease (changed survey)	Washington State Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors and Healthy Youth Survey
Maine (1999)	30.4% (1997)	22.3% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Hawaii (2000)	24.7% (1999)	17.2% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Nevada (2000)	25.9% (1999)	19.8% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Colorado (2000)	The only before-and-after data available for Colorado is from the National Survey on Drug Use & Health (NSDUH). However, the NSDUH advises that data from 2002 and later is not comparable to prior years' data due to methodological changes. ⁴			
Vermont (2004)	28.2% (2003)	26.5% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Montana (2004)	23.1% (2003)	21.1% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Rhode Island (2006)	25% (2005)	23.0% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
New Mexico (2007)	26.2% (2005)	27.7% (2019)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Michigan (2008)	18.0% (2007)	21.6% (2019)	increase	The CDC's YRBSS
New Jersey (2010)	20.3% (2009)	20.1% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Arizona (2010)	23.7% (2009)	26.1% (2019)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Delaware (2011)	25.8% (2009)	26.1% (2017)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS

⁴ Were one to compare the 1999 data to the most recent data (2019-2020) despite this admonition, it would indicate a decrease among 12-17 year olds from 10.3 to 8.45%.

State	Pre-Law Current Use Rates	Most Recent Use Rates	Trend?	Data Source
Connecticut (2012)	24.1% (2011)	21.7% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Massachusetts (2012)	27.9% (2011)	26.0% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
New Hampshire (2013)	28.4% (2011)	26.1% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Illinois (2013)	23.1% (2011)	21.8% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Maryland (2014)	19.8% (2013)	17.6% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Minnesota (2014)	16.6% (11th graders, 2013)	15.5% (11th graders, 2019)	decrease	Minnesota Student Survey
New York (2014)	21.4% (2013)	19.1% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Louisiana (2016)	17.5% (2013)	19.0% (2019)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Pennsylvania (2016)	18.2% (2015)	19.6% (2019)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Ohio (2016)	20.7% (2013)	15.8% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Arkansas (2016)	17.8% (2015)	17.5% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Florida (2016)	21.5% (2015)	19.6% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
North Dakota (2016)	15.2% (2015)	12.5% (2019)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
West Virginia (2017)	16.5% (2015)	18.9% (2019)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Oklahoma (2018)	15.9% (2017)	17.0% (2019)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS

State	Pre-Law Current Use Rates	Most Recent Use Rates	Trend?	Data Source
Missouri (2018)	19.9% (2017)	16.3% (2019)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Utah (2018)	8.1% (2017)	10.0% (2019)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Virginia (2020)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			
South Dakota (2020)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			
Alabama (2021)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			
Mississippi (2022)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			

This data should put to rest claims that removing criminal penalties from seriously ill patients' medical use of cannabis increases teens' cannabis use.