



Teen Marijuana Use Does Not Increase Following Marijuana Policy Reforms

Study after study has confirmed that marijuana policy reforms do not cause rates of youth marijuana use to increase. In June 2016, a study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* found that the number of teens using marijuana — and the number with problematic use — is falling as more states legalize or decriminalize cannabis. The findings were based on a survey of more than 200,000 youth in all 50 states.

Data has long shown that medical marijuana protections do not cause teen marijuana use rates to increase. A 2015 national study covering 24 years of data published in *The Lancet* found that medical marijuana laws do not lead to an increase in teen marijuana use. According to the lead researcher of the study, Dr. Deborah Hasin, the findings “provide the strongest evidence to date that marijuana use by teenagers does not increase after a state legalizes medical marijuana.” Similarly, as the American Academy of Pediatrics noted in its statement supporting decriminalization, “Decriminalization of recreational use of marijuana by adults has also not led to an increase in youth use rates of recreational marijuana.”

As of December 2016, available data suggests that legalizing and regulating marijuana for adult use has not significantly impacted teen marijuana use either. Below are data tables for five youth behavior surveys comparing past 30-day marijuana use for teenagers before and after the passage of legalization laws in Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska.

The most in-depth state surveys suggest modest decreases in rates of youth marijuana use in Colorado and Washington, both of which approved initiatives to regulate marijuana like alcohol in 2012.¹ Data from the Monitoring the Future Survey indicates decreases in use among 10th and 12th graders in Colorado and slight increases among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in Washington. Surveys of students in Alaska and Oregon, both of which approved legal marijuana for adults in 2014, indicate small decreases in teen marijuana use from 2013 to 2015. The National Survey of Drug Use and Health — which includes small surveys for each state — indicates that teen use in Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska has remained virtually unchanged. Nationwide, two surveys with large sample sizes show a modest decrease in teen marijuana use rates since states began legalizing marijuana for adults 21 and older.

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (past 30-day use)

	2010	2012	2014	2016
8th grade	9.5%	9.4%	7.3%	6.4%
10th grade	20.0%	19.3%	18.1%	17.2%
12th grade	26.3%	26.7%	26.7%	26.4%

¹ In 2015, the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey sampled approximately 15,000 high school students (9th to 12th grade). The 2014 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey obtained data from approximately 25,000 students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade). The Monitoring the Future Study surveyed approximately 1,500 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in Colorado and roughly 2,600 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in Washington during both intervals ('10-'12 and '13-'15). The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, however, has a sample size of roughly 300 in the 12 to 17 year old age category for both Colorado and Washington. The national sample of 12 to 17 year olds for the NSDUH is approximately 23,000. It is not clear if it controls for age, or if one year oversampling older or younger teenagers could cause skewed results.

Colorado Healthy Kids Survey (past 30-day use)

	2011	2013	2015
9 th – 12 th grade	22.0%	19.7%	21.2%

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

	'11-'12	'12-'13	'13-'14	'14-'15
Colo., 12-17 years old	10.5%	11.2%	12.6%	11.1%
Wash., 12-17 years old	9.5%	9.8%	10.1%	9.2%
Alaska, 12-17 years old	10.0%	8.7%	9.2%	10.6%
Ore., 12-17 years old	9.9%	9.6%	10.2%	9.4%
D.C., 12-17 years old	N/A	N/A	10.6%	8.9%

Oregon Healthy Teens Survey (past 30-day use)

	2013	2015
8 th grade	9.7%	8.8%
11 th grade	20.9%	19.1%

Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use)

	2013	2015
9 th – 12 th grade	19.7%	19.0%

National Survey on Drug Use and Health (past 30-day use)

	'11-'12	'12-'13	'13-'14	'14-'15
U.S., 12-17 years old	7.6%	7.2%	7.2%	7.2%

National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use)²

	2011	2013	2015
U.S., 9 th – 12 th grade	23.1%	23.4%	21.7%

Monitoring the Future (past 30-day use)

	CO '10-'12	CO '13-'15	WA '10-'12	WA '13-'15
8 th graders	8.9%	8.9%	6.2%	8.2%
10 th graders	17.0%	13.5%	16.2%	20.3%
12 th graders	27.4%	25.5%	21.2%	21.8%

² The NYRBS does not include recent data for Colorado, Washington, or Oregon.