

Health Impacts of Marijuana Use

Research Summary

Milly Allen, Research Analyst

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Adolescents: Use

- According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Survey:¹
 - 35.8% of Montana high school students (29.5% of U.S. high school students) reported past marijuana use
 - 19.6% of Montana high school students (17% of U.S. high school students) reported current marijuana use (past 30 days)
- The percentage of U.S. teens who vaped flavored marijuana solution increased from 2021 to 2024, making this one of very few drug outcomes that increased after the pandemic.²
- The onset age of cannabis use is around 15 years old.³

Adolescents: Risk Factors & Protective Behaviors

- Parental monitoring, or knowledge of the child's activities, whereabouts, and relationships, is associated with delayed initiation and levels of cannabis use and substance-related problems.⁴
- Higher school connectedness is associated with a lower risk of marijuana use (and binge drinking and smoking) in teens.⁵
- Influence of peers is an important factor in cannabis use, but adolescents are even more likely to use cannabis when their close friends do so.³

Adolescents: Health Impacts

- Adolescents who used marijuana had 37% higher odds of developing depression in young adulthood.⁶
- Adolescents who use cannabis have 50% higher odds of suicidal ideation compared with non-users.⁶
- Cannabis has potentially detrimental effects on cognition, the brain, and educational outcomes that persist beyond acute intoxication. However, these impairments appear to improve with sustained abstinence.⁷

Adults: Use

- Young adults aged 18 to 25 (36.6%) and adults aged 26 to 49 (29.1%) were more likely than adults aged 50 or older (14.0%) to have used marijuana in the past year.⁸
 - These differences remained when adjusted for sex, race/ethnicity, education level, region, county type, and poverty level.
- 25.8% of male adults (18 or older) used marijuana in the past year, compared to only 20.6% of female adults.⁸
- 21% of adults 19 to 30 years old reported past year marijuana vaping in 2022, the highest levels reported by the Measuring the Future study since it added this measurement in 2017 (12%).⁹

Young Adults: Risk Perception and its Impact

- Perceived low risk of cannabis use is associated with greater likelihood of use among young adults. An analysis of adults 18-25 in Washington state found that an increasing number of young adults believe cannabis use is low-risk.¹⁰
- In that same study, young adults who believed cannabis use is common among people their age were more likely to report cannabis use themselves.¹⁰

Adults: Risk Factors

- Studies consistently identify young age of initiation as a predictor for adult use of marijuana.
- Having a spouse or cohabitating partner who uses marijuana increases the likelihood of marijuana use by more than 7 times.¹¹
- Higher emotional support and greater social engagement are associated with lower odds of reporting past-year cannabis use among rural, working-age adults.¹²

Adults: Risk Factors

- Adults with co-occurring mental health conditions and substance use disorders have an elevated risk of persistent cannabis use. The link with depression and anxiety warrants further research.¹³
- Approximately 1 in 4 patients with schizophrenia are also diagnosed with CUD.¹⁴
- Individuals who have a current or lifetime diagnosis of cannabis use disorder (CUD) are at increased risk for the development of an alcohol use disorder.¹⁴

Adults: Health Impacts

- Individuals who have a current or lifetime diagnosis of cannabis use disorder (CUD) are at increased likelihood for the development of an alcohol use disorder.¹⁴
- According to one study, regular cannabis users under 50 have:
 - 6.2 times higher odds of experiencing a heart attack than nonusers;
 - 4.3 times higher odds of experiencing an ischemic stroke than nonusers;
 - Have a slightly lower survival probability in both events than nonusers.¹⁵
- Regular cannabis use is associated with an early, often reversible form of reduced blood vessel function. This impaired function is seen in otherwise healthy users who smoke or eat cannabis.¹⁶

Comparison to Alcohol

- No deaths from marijuana have been reported, according to the DEA.¹⁷
- The CDC asserts that excessive alcohol use is a leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., causing approximately 178,000 deaths. These deaths include chronic conditions like liver disease and cancer, as well as acute causes such as car accidents and poisoning.¹⁸
- THC impairment is more difficult to measure than alcohol impairment. THC blood levels do not correlate consistently with cognitive impairment, and remain detectable long after acute intoxication.¹⁹

Footnotes

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Footnotes

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