



Legalization of Marijuana and Implications for Health

Just the facts, know the risks!

By Jennifer Faringer

New York state enacted the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) earlier in 2021, legalizing and regulating the use and possession of cannabis for adults ages 21 and older.

The measure paves the way for marijuana dispensaries and marijuana lounges, with dispensaries expected to begin opening by the end of 2022.

While some view this as a business opportunity, it's important to recognize the potential health risks and impact on our communities, families and our youth. It is important to have the facts, know the risks and remember that legal does not equal safe. Marijuana remains an addictive drug.

While we continue to focus on the overdose epidemic, primarily caused by the increase in availability and sales of illicit fentanyl, it's important to keep in mind that opioids are rarely the first drug of use. Alcohol, nicotine (vaping) and marijuana are the top three drugs that most significantly place young people at risk. With the legalization of marijuana comes a corresponding decline in the perception of risk which results in an increase in use, according to research and surveys. Marijuana is often the first drug teens try, but not the last!

- The impact of marijuana on brain development is of concern for youth with research showing a decrease in IQ by six to seven points with early, regular use.

- While teens report using marijuana to cope with anxiety and depression, recent studies have shown that using marijuana only worsens both.

- Marijuana smoked or vaped damages lung tissue similar to tobacco use. Studies have also shown that marijuana decreases the body's ability to fight infection thus weakening the immune system.

- With the increasing potency of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) over the last several decades from 1% to 4% in the 1960s to now 20% to up to 90% THC found in concentrated forms, the risk increases.

When ingested, the effects of marijuana are not felt as quickly as when smoked or vaped. For those ingesting edibles intentionally, this delayed reaction often leads to taking more to feel the expected effect and may result in effects ranging from

drowsiness and lethargy, to loss of muscle coordination, agitation and irritability, and confusion.

Edibles are of a particular concern as reports are pointing to increasing instances of pediatric poisonings as a result of children accidentally ingesting marijuana-laced food products and candy which are often packaged in a way that can be indistinguishable from actual food products. With children under age 3, the impacts of pediatric poisoning are more critical and may include respiratory depression and seizures.

Another concern is an increase in drugged driving. Driving while impaired is illegal no matter what substance is being consumed. In New York, it is illegal for both the driver and passengers to use marijuana. While an individual under the influence of marijuana may feel in control and focused, what they are experiencing is a fixation of focus, along with a decrease in peripheral vision and a slowed reaction time. It's no wonder that after alcohol, marijuana is the most identified drug in deadly crashes. Impaired or drugged driving jeopardizes the safety of all who travel on the roads and highways.

As marijuana potency increases, it's not a surprise that the risk of becoming addicted has also increased, nor is it a surprise that marijuana is often the number one reason teens seek treatment. Despite legalization, marijuana remains an addictive drug!

For more information and a wide range of resources for parents and the community, visit our website awareness page at: <https://ncadd-ra.org/resources/awareness-campaigns/marijuana/>.

To schedule a presentation contact jfaringer@depaul.org.



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National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence – Rochester Area

Just the facts, know the risks...

Using marijuana while driving is **illegal in NYS for the driver and passenger(s)**.

Impaired or drugged driving jeopardizes the safety of all who travel on NYS roads and highways!

After alcohol, marijuana is the most commonly identified drugs in deadly crashes.

Legal does not equal safe. Marijuana is an addictive drug.

- Marijuana is only legal in NYS for those 21 and older.
- Did you know marijuana is often first drug teens try, but not the last!?
- Did you know marijuana is often the #1 reason teens seek treatment?

The potency of marijuana has increased dramatically in the last several decades. THC, the cannabinoid producing the high, is at 20 percent or more in many states where it has been legalized. With concentrates, THC potency often exceeds 75-85 percent or more! As the potency of marijuana increases, the potential for addiction also increases.

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