

## Marijuana The Facts

The perception of marijuana as a harmless drug gained steam during the '60s and '70s. Rock groups and other pop culture figures from that era unwittingly characterized the drug as benign.

Now, several decades later, that soft perception--a misperception--continues, even though marijuana is much more potent and more dangerous than ever before. That soft perception continues, even though more teens enter treatment for marijuana addiction each year than for all other illicit drugs combined.

"Marijuana is riskier than people think, especially for kids," said John P. Walters, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. "It can lead to significant health and behaviour problems for youth disrupting families and jeopardizing our children's futures. The risks associated with marijuana have been trivialized and our kids are getting the wrong message. It is time to dispel the myths about marijuana. We must arm parents, teachers, community leaders and our children with the truth."

Walters' remarks were made to help kick off the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, a major marijuana prevention initiative launched in September by the ONDCP and 17 national organizations, including the American Medical Association. The effort is in response to the popularity of marijuana, particularly among young people. According to the recently released 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, a survey of 70,000 Americans age 12 years and older, the percentage of current marijuana users (those who used at least once in the last month) increased from 4.8 percent in 2000 to 5.4 percent in 2001.

Marijuana is by far the most widely used illicit drug among American youth. Sixty percent of young people who use illicit drugs use marijuana only, and twice as many eighth-graders today have tried marijuana as compared to a decade ago. The new users of this psychoactive drug have been getting younger since 1972. New users ages 12 to 17 doubled from 800,000 in 1990 to 1.6 million in 1996; the number of new users in that age-group has remained at about 1.6 million each year since 1996.

Especially alarming in the recent drug use survey are that young people's attitudes about marijuana remain soft. The percentage of young people ages 12 to 17 who view marijuana use as a "great risk" declined from 56 percent in 2000 to 53.5 percent in 2001. This reduced perception of risk is an important predictor of future drug use.

Thus, the high incidence of marijuana use among young people is expected to continue. To help reverse this trend, prevention specialists urge parents and young people to learn more about the facts of marijuana. For instance:

- **Marijuana today is much more potent.** The average THC content (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) of marijuana, or the chemical that produces the "high," has increased five-fold, from 1 percent in 1974 vs. 5 percent in 1997.
- **Acute effects.** Marijuana can impair speech, thinking, judgment, short-term memory, coordination and balance. It can cause drowsiness, delusions, impaired vision, severe vomiting, headache and dizziness, all hazards to anyone attempting to drive.
- **Respiratory problems and cancer.** Chronic marijuana use contributes to respiratory ailments such as coughs, sore throats, bronchitis and pneumonia. Marijuana contains cancer-causing agents, similar to tobacco smoke.
- **Addiction.** About 200,000 people who enter drug treatment each year report marijuana as their primary drug of choice. Sixty percent of teens in drug treatment for illicit drugs are there because of marijuana.

- **Increased risky behaviour.** Young marijuana users are more likely to engage in risky behaviours, such as having sex, committing acts of violence, and driving under the influence. Weekly users are five times more likely to steal and four times more likely to engage in violent acts than those who don't use.
- **Poor academic performance.** Research suggests that marijuana is linked with decreased motivation and energy, and marijuana users don't do as well in school. Young people with an average grade of 'D' or below were more than four times as likely to have used marijuana than those with an average grade of 'A.'

Studies show that parents are the single most powerful influence in their children's lives. Parents who are involved and talk to their kids about drugs can keep them drug-free.

*Some other products from RecoverOz on this subject include*

[\*\*Dangerous Drugs\*\*](#) *An Easy-to-Use Reference for Parents and Professionals provides information on marijuana and other drugs. Product Code: #1899 Hazelden by Carol Falkowski*

[\*\*Greening Out DVD\*\*](#) *23 mins. Made in Australia, this is the most effective and watchable video on marijuana use available today. Product Code: #9804*

[\*\*Marijuana - What's a Parent to Believe?\*\*](#)

*Maybe you smoked pot as a teen, or you use marijuana today. Maybe you're simply confused over conflicting claims about the drug whether it's addictive, how harmful it is, why some think it should be legalised. The basic message is up to you, but you need to know the facts. Product Code: 2202*

[\*\*Marijuana: Neurochemistry & Physiology\*\*](#)

*DVD, 37 mins. **Online preview available** when you 'click to see more.'* This DVD presents an objective non-judgemental examination of marijuana through the use of animation, graphics, interviews with current users and those in recovery. Product Code: #CNS314

[\*\*Quitting Marijuana Workbook\*\*](#) *Your Personal Recovery Plan Product Code: #2157*