



What Does the American Academy of Pediatrics Say About Marijuana?

by Doug Puder, MD

In 1920 the prohibition era began and alcohol became illegal in this country. Crime and poisonings from bootleg alcohol led to the repeal of prohibition in 1933. Now many states are making marijuana legal. How should this be presented to our teenage and young adult patients?

While we are glad that drinking alcohol is not a crime, we do not think it is healthy for anyone in excess and know that alcohol brings health particular risks for our teenagers and young adults.

The same is true for marijuana. While we may agree that marijuana use should not be a crime, we are not recommending that our patients smoke or ingest it. Marijuana, cannabis and THC also bring many health risks for our teenagers and young adults.

Over the past year, marijuana use has increased by 36% in high school seniors with a decreased concern about the harmful effects of marijuana smoke. Many studies have shown health risks:

Short-term effects include decreased attention, concentration and interference with learning. Motor control, coordination, and reaction time are also impaired. Depression and mental health disorders can worsen. Odds of completing high school or college are lower.

Long term studies of heavy marijuana users raise concerns about brain maturation and functioning. The ambition and motivation of heavy users decreases. The smoke is toxic similar to secondhand tobacco smoke, and the use of vaporizers do not decrease this risk.

What about medical marijuana? Adult studies show some benefit for chemo-induced nausea, chronic pain and certain chronic diseases with weight loss. The only studied benefit in children has been for a few rare seizure disorders.

Today's marijuana is three to five times stronger than it was ten years ago. Currently recreational marijuana is legal in seven states and medical marijuana is legal in 28 states including New York.

We encourage parents to discuss this with their teenagers. Recreational marijuana is not a healthy choice for them.



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