

Marijuana Use Facts ~ Education into Action

Marijuana, made up of dried parts of *Cannabis sativa*, the hemp plant, is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States. Marijuana possession was de-criminalized after Massachusetts residents overwhelmingly approved the passage of *Question 2: Marijuana* in 2008. This law, effective January 2009, reclassified possession of less than one ounce of marijuana from a criminal to a civil offense resulting in a \$100 fine. Many experts believe this legislation has resulted in a decrease in the perception of risk and harm and an increase in marijuana use among adolescents.

Adolescent Marijuana Use

According to the 2008 Metrowest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS), 33% of Needham High School students reported using marijuana in their lifetime and 24% reported use during the last 30 days. These self reported marijuana use rates are consistent with the rates of use reported by teens in the 22 communities participating in the 2008 MWAHS.

What are the Facts and Consequences?

Marijuana use is harmful to adolescents physically, psychologically and social/emotionally. Experts agree that marijuana smokers are susceptible to the same health problems as tobacco smokers. Such risks include lung infections such as bronchitis, emphysema, bronchial asthma, and an increased opportunity for neck, head and lung cancer later in life. Over 400 different chemicals have been found in marijuana smoke, largely attributed to high levels of tar, with 50-70% more carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco smoke.

A myriad of research disseminated through the *National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)* and The White House *Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)* provides a clear correlation to increased incidences of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, addiction and schizophrenia in young people who use marijuana.*

- Weekly or more frequent use of marijuana can double a teen's risk of depression and anxiety. Teens who smoke marijuana when feeling depressed are also more likely to become addicted to marijuana or other illicit drugs.
- Eight percent of depressed teens abused, or became dependent, on marijuana during the year they experienced depression compared with only three percent of non-depressed teens.
- Daily use of marijuana among girls is associated with a fivefold increase in the odds of developing depression and anxiety.
- Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana that determines potency, has risen dramatically since the 1970's with potency studies indicating up to a fivefold increase.

- Smoking marijuana causes some changes in the brain that are similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin, and alcohol. Heavy or daily use of marijuana affects the parts of the brain that control memory, attention, and learning.
- Teenagers, ages 12 to 17 who smoke marijuana weekly, are three times more likely to have thoughts of committing suicide, and those who have used marijuana in the past year experience increased incidences of anxiety and panic attacks.
- Marijuana is addictive. More teens are in treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illicit drugs combined.
- Several studies have documented marijuana's link with symptoms of schizophrenia and report that marijuana is an independent risk factor for schizophrenia. Heavy users of marijuana at age 18 increase their risk of schizophrenia later in life by six times.
- Marijuana use increases the risk of developing schizophrenia among people with no prior history of a disorder, and early use of marijuana (age 15 vs. age 18) increases the risk even more. Youth with a personal or family history of schizophrenia are at an even greater risk of marijuana-induced psychosis.
- Longitudinal research on marijuana use among young people, below college age, indicates those who use have lower academic achievement than non-users, more acceptance of deviant behavior, more delinquent behavior and aggression, greater rebelliousness, poorer relationships with parents, and more associations with delinquent and drug-using friends.

What Can Parents Do? Education into Action

Get educated; the facts and statistics are powerful! Knowledge is power for you and your family members in regard to choosing to use marijuana. Talk to your adolescent about the risks and potential harm of marijuana use, share the facts and the science related to the physical, psychological, and social/ emotional effects of use. ***Two thirds of youth ages 13-17 say losing their parents' respect and pride is one of the main reasons they do not smoke marijuana or use other drugs.*** Establish clear guidelines, monitor your adolescent's activities, communicate consequences for substance use and follow through on enforcement to reduce repeated use incidences. Reach out for help if needed, your commitment to your teen will make a difference!

Who Can Help?

Feelings of isolation and confusion often engulf parents who are coping with an adolescent who is abusing marijuana, leaving parents to navigate the myths and facts of marijuana use on their own. The Needham Public Health Department (NPHD) is committed to supporting the overall wellness of Needham families. During the last year, our department has responded to numerous inquiries from concerned parents regarding their adolescents' use and abuse patterns of marijuana. We have worked confidentially with parents, providing factual information and resources on the risks and harm of marijuana use by teens, as well as guidance and support in developing a plan to reduce this high risk behavior as they secure intervention and/or treatment resources for their teenager.

The NPHD encourages parents to pursue professional clinical support for assessment and a treatment plan for their teen through a variety of local substance use assessment and treatment focused centers such as: Children's Hospital Adolescent Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), Addiction Recovery Management Services (ARMS) at Massachusetts General Hospital, and Sameem Associates. After an experienced clinical assessment, parents are equipped to make an informed decision regarding their teen's treatment plan and how to incorporate family strategies to ensure structure in the home to keep teens healthy and safe.

Log onto the websites listed here to obtain factual information on marijuana and strategies for talking with your adolescent. For further information contact Carol Read, Substance Abuse Prevention & Education Coordinator, Needham Public Health Department 781-455-7500 (Ext.259) cread@needhamma.gov

<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/marijuana/index.html>

<http://drugabuse.gov/> <http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugs-marijuana.aspx>

<http://www.timetotalk.org/>

*Research citations available upon request

