



Marijuana Policy Reform Does NOT Result in More Teen Use

Study after study has concluded that marijuana policy reform is not linked to increased rates of marijuana use among teens. In July 2019, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a major report analyzing federal data from more than 1.4 million high school students.¹ The researchers found that legalization of marijuana for adults was associated with an 8% decline in past 30-day marijuana use and a 9% decline in frequent use among teens. The study also looked at medical cannabis laws and concluded they had no impact on youth marijuana use. These findings were consistent with the results of a meta-analysis of 55 academic papers and multiple data sources published by the journal *Current Addiction Reports* in September 2018. Those researchers wrote that, “Liberal forms of medical cannabis regulation ... have not to date increased rates of cannabis use among adolescents.”²

Another major report focused on cannabis use disorders among adolescents from 2002 to 2013. During that time, as dozens of significant marijuana policy reforms were passed throughout the states, a peer-reviewed study in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* found that, “Past-year prevalence of marijuana use disorders among US adolescents declined by an estimated 24%.”³

In 2012, Colorado and Washington became the first states to legalize marijuana for adult use. Both have conducted large-scale surveys involving tens of thousands of high school students in the years since. In each case, the results (see below) show an overall *reduction* of past 30-day marijuana use among teens. Research published in the journal *Substance Abuse* also suggests that legalization has not increased use among teens that were already using marijuana. A 2018 study focused on youth in Washington State found “no evidence that policy change influenced heavy-using adolescents’ rates of use nor the proposed risk factors associated with problematic use patterns.”⁴

As of July 2019, virtually all available data suggests that regulating marijuana for adult use does not result in increases in marijuana use among youth. Below are data tables for youth surveys comparing past 30-day marijuana use for teens before and after adult-use legalization laws passed in eight states — Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, California, Maine, Massachusetts, and Nevada.⁵ **According to the most comprehensive surveys, no state has seen an overall increase outside of the confidence interval since passage.** Most of the data suggests slight decreases within the confidence intervals. Meanwhile, two nationwide surveys show a modest decrease in teen use since states began legalizing cannabis for adults.

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2012⁶

| | 2010 | 2012 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 8th grade | 9.5% | 9.4% | 7.3% | 6.4% | 7.0% |
| 10th grade | 20.0% | 19.3% | 18.1% | 17.2% | 17.9% |
| 12th grade | 26.3% | 26.7% | 26.7% | 26.4% | 26.2% |

¹ Anderson, Mark D., et al. “Association of Marijuana Laws With Teen Marijuana Use New Estimates From the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 2019.

² Leung, Janni, et al. “Has the Legalisation of Medical and Recreational Cannabis Use in the USA Affected the Prevalence of Cannabis Use and Cannabis Use Disorders?,” *Current Addiction Reports*, September 2018.

³ Grucza, Richard A., et al. “Declining Prevalence of Marijuana Use Disorders Among Adolescents in the United States, 2002 to 2013.” *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 55, no. 6, 2016.

⁴ Blevins, Claire E., et al. “The Implications of Cannabis Policy Changes in Washington on Adolescent Perception of Risk, Norms, Attitudes, and Substance Use,” *Substance Abuse: Research and Treatment*, December 2018.

⁵ Michigan and Vermont, which legalized marijuana for adults in 2018, do not have “after” data yet and are thus excluded.

⁶ Accessed here: <http://www.askhys.net/FactSheets>

Colorado Healthy Kids Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2012⁷

| | 2011 | 2013 | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 9th – 12th grade | 22.0% | 19.7% | 21.2% | 19.4% |

Oregon Healthy Teens Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2014⁸

| | 2013 | 2015 | 2017 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 8th grade | 9.7% | 8.8% | 6.7% |
| 11th grade | 20.9% | 19.1% | 20.9% |

Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2014⁹

| | 2013 | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 9th – 12th grade | 19.7% | 19.0% | 21.5% |

California Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2016¹⁰

| | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 9th – 12th grade | 22.9% | 21.8% |

Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2016¹¹

| | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 9th – 12th grade | 24.5% | 24.1% |

Maine Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2016¹²

| | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 9th – 12th grade | 19.9% | 18.8% |

Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2016¹³

| | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 9th – 12th grade | 19.3% | 17.9% |

⁷ Accessed here: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/hkcs>

⁸ Accessed here: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BirthDeathCertificates/Surveys/OregonHealthyTeens/Pages/index.aspx>

⁹ Accessed here: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/results.htm>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

National Survey on Drug Use and Health (past 30-day use, small sample size)¹⁴

| | '12-'13 | '13-'14 | '14-'15 | '15-'16 | '16-'17 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| U.S., 12-17 years old | 7.2% | 7.2% | 7.2% | 6.8% | 6.5% |
| Colo., 12-17 years old | 11.2% | 12.6% | 11.1% | 9.1% | 9.0% |
| Wash., 12-17 years old | 9.8% | 10.1% | 9.2% | 7.9% | 9.0% |
| Alaska, 12-17 years old | 8.7% | 9.2% | 10.6% | 10.4% | 8.8% |
| Ore., 12-17 years old | 9.6% | 10.2% | 9.4% | 9.8% | 10.4% |
| D.C., 12-17 years old | 9.9% | 10.6% | 8.9% | 8.1% | 8.3% |
| Nev., 12-17 years old | 8.3% | 8.0% | 7.4% | 8.7% | 8.8% |
| Maine, 12-17 years old | 9.3% | 9.9% | 10.0% | 9.7% | 9.9% |
| Calif., 12-17 years old | 7.8% | 8.7% | 8.3% | 7.3% | 6.9% |
| Mass., 12-17 years old | 8.9% | 8.9% | 9.2% | 8.7% | 8.9% |

Nationwide Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use)¹⁵

| | 2011 | 2013 | 2015 | 2017 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 9th – 12th grade | 23.1% | 23.4% | 21.7% | 19.8% |

¹⁴ Accessed here: <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/data-we-collect/nsduh-national-survey-drug-use-and-health>

¹⁵ Accessed here: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/results.htm>

Note: Other than the above surveys, the only data we are aware of is Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys. However, MTF's state-specific data is not publicly available. One study discussed MTF data and combined three years of "before" and three years of "after" data for two states. Unfortunately, MPP is unable to access the data necessary for a before-and-after comparison — comparing the year immediately preceding legalization with the most recent year for all states. MTF surveys also rely on a far smaller sample size for each state than the state-specific survey. For example, Washington state's HYS surveys more than 200,000 Washington students each year, while MTF surveyed only 5,509 students in Washington.