



How Communities Can Protect Youth from Marijuana-Related Harm

Prepared by Rethinking Access to Marijuana · October 2015



The changing role of marijuana in communities sparks a wide range of strong reactions. Yet, across the spectrum, most agree it should not be easily accessible to youth.

Who We Are

Rethinking Access to Marijuana (RAM) is a collaboration of community-based organizations seeking to prevent marijuana-related harms by limiting youth access and exposure to marijuana in the County of Los Angeles.

Potential Harms of Marijuana Use on Youth

Emerging research demonstrates that there are side effects to regular marijuana use, including potentially dangerous harms to brain development among teens that may translate to an up to 8 point drop in IQ¹. The impacts on brain development are likely to blame for the social and developmental problems associated with youth marijuana use, such as poorer school performance, higher school dropout rates² and impaired verbal, cognitive, and attention performance as compared to non-users³. These effects increase with earlier and heavier marijuana use.

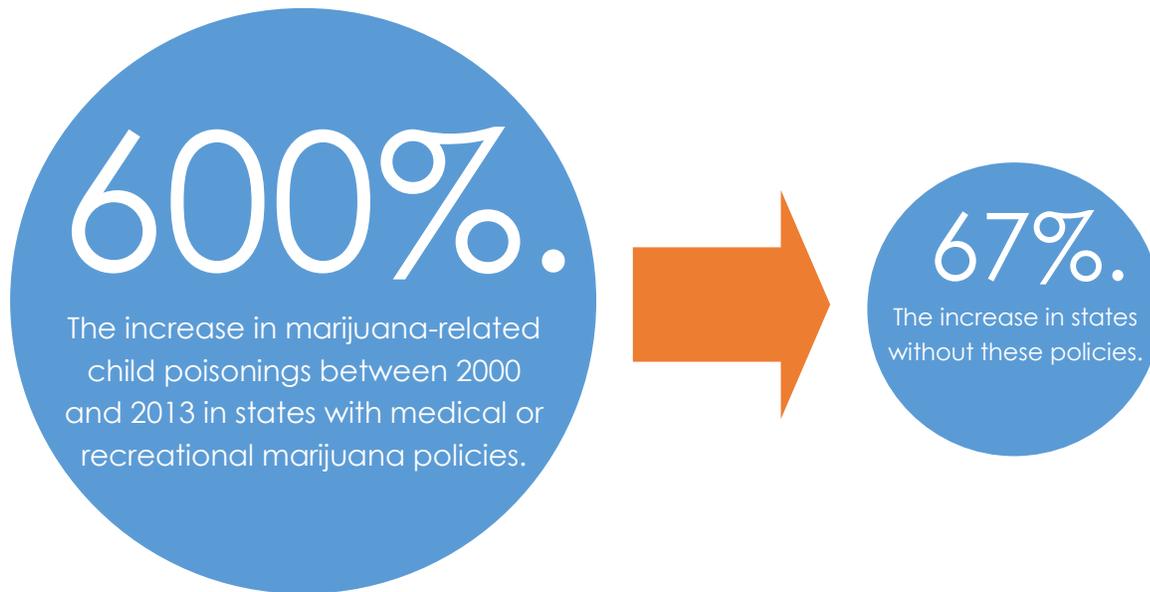
THC (the active ingredient in marijuana) poisoning poses the greatest risk for younger children. States with medical or recreational marijuana policies experienced an **over 600%** increase in child THC poisonings between 2000 and 2013, compared to a 67% increase in states without these policies⁴.

Social Influences on Marijuana Use

Knowing the harms of marijuana use will likely not be enough to deter young people from using it if they think their peers are all using it or if the adults in their life use it. Despite popular beliefs that marijuana use is prevalent among youth, data show this isn't so — only 25% of youth in LA County aged 12-17 report using

“Youth are one of the groups most at risk for...harms associated with regular marijuana use.”

- California Blue Ribbon Commission on Marijuana Policy (July 2015)



marijuana. Usage peaks from 18-24 (35%), but goes down in adults: only 15% of adults 25 years and older report marijuana use⁵.

Additionally, increased exposure to marijuana seems to correlate to increased youth use. According to a nationwide survey of young adults ages 18 to 25, children of parents who smoke marijuana are *more than three times more likely to use it themselves*. Among those whose parents had used marijuana, 72% had used it also. Conversely, only 20% of those whose parents had never used marijuana reported having used marijuana themselves⁶.

Ways to Limit Youth Access to Marijuana

Support Public Health Regulations for Marijuana

Marijuana legalization has the potential for serious negative impact on the health and safety of communities, and youth in particular. Therefore, it is important to consider regulations that can be put in place to address these problems. Research on the effective regulation of alcohol and tobacco indicates the following restrictions are recommended to minimize youth access and use:

- **Restricting and carefully monitoring licenses and licensees.** Licensing provisions that are actively enforced through regular random compliance checks in which violators, such as those that sell to minors, are subject to meaningful penalties (including license suspension and revocation) create a culture of compliance amongst marijuana licensees.
- **Restrict density of marijuana outlets.** Decades of research on alcohol and tobacco use has demonstrated the need for strong controls on the density of businesses⁷. The physical availability of medical marijuana dispensaries is similarly related to current use and more frequent use⁸. Density restrictions on the number of businesses that can locate in a given area prevent overconcentrations of marijuana outlets in our neighborhoods. Marijuana delivery services have been found to circumvent these important community protections⁸ and are illegal throughout Los Angeles County
- **Restrictions on where businesses can be located.** Marijuana-related businesses should not be located near areas youth frequent such as schools, parks, and playgrounds. Prohibiting businesses from

72%

of children who report their parents use marijuana have used it also.

Research shows the more marijuana use is seen as normal, the more likely youth are to try it themselves.

Only 20%

of children whose parents have never used marijuana use it themselves.

operating near churches, residential areas and other high-risk businesses, such as those that sell alcohol, is also highly recommended.

Below are other recommended regulations that reduce the extent to which youth are exposed to marijuana:

- **Limiting the types of products sold**, including prohibiting the sale of products that are especially appealing to youth, such as candy containing marijuana.
- **Limitations on marketing that promotes the sale and use of marijuana products**, including window signs, billboards, print and television advertisements, especially onscreen use in television and film.
- **Preventing impaired driving** through highly publicized checkpoints designed to deter marijuana impaired driving.
- **Restricting public consumption** at parks, concerts, sporting events, malls, public transportation sites, etc.

Additionally, community support for a comprehensive data collection strategy could make a big difference in understanding the scope of youth marijuana use and abuse in LA County.

What Can You Do?

Change can start with you! Here are a few ways to take action in your community.

- **Join or create a community coalition.** Through active participation in a community coalition, you can come together with concerned neighbors, determine effective strategies, and most importantly, have a collective voice in your community that can powerfully shape public opinion.
- **Advocate for laws that protect youth.** Policymakers listen to community members. Make your voice heard by writing letters or appearing as a spokesperson to support legislation that protects youth, such as limiting marijuana outlet density in your community.
- **Write letters to the editor and guest editorials.** Write your concerns about marijuana and its impact on youth in a letter to the editor or a guest editorial.
- **Educate your friends and family.** Talk with your friends, neighbors and family about the issues. Share the research to help dispel myths and protect youth.
- **Promote extracurricular activities.** Keeping youth busy after school can prevent marijuana use⁹. Support local organizations that provide a healthy forum for youth, or create fun, alcohol- and drug-free social activities for youth.

About Rethinking Access to Marijuana

Rethinking Access to Marijuana (RAM) is a collaboration of public health professionals seeking to prevent marijuana-related harms by limiting youth access to marijuana in the County of Los Angeles.

This group was established with the vision of educating communities about the potential harms of marijuana use; implementing and evaluating environmental strategies formulated to limit youth accessibility to and availability of marijuana; and influencing policy actions that support flourishing youth and communities free from marijuana-related harms.

RAM neither supports nor opposes any specific legislation. Rather, we take a prevention-oriented public health approach, educating policy-makers and communities about ways to protect youth from the potential harms of marijuana use and abuse.

References

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Rethinking Access to Marijuana is a collaboration of over 25 community-based groups, including:

- Asian American Drug Abuse Program
- Behavioral Health Services, Inc.
- Children's Hospital Los Angeles
- Day One
- Helpline Youth Counseling
- Koreatown Youth and Community Center
- LA County Office of Education
- MJB Transitional Recovery
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence - San Fernando Valley
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence of the East San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys
- Partnership for a Positive Pomona
- People Coordinated Services of Southern California, Inc.
- Pueblo y Salud
- Phoenix House
- San Fernando Valley Partnership
- Shields for Families
- Social Model Recovery Services
- South Central Prevention Coalition
- SPIRITT Family Services
- Tarzana Treatment Centers, Inc.
- Watts Healthcare Corporation
- Westside Impact Project
- Venice Bridge Project