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“We change laws.”

Do Medical Marijuana Laws Increase Teens’ Marijuana Use?

Since states first began considering medical marijuana laws, claims have frequently been made that the laws “send the wrong message” to adolescents, causing their marijuana use to increase. Now, more than 17 years after the passage of the nation’s first effective state medical marijuana law, a considerable body of data has found that those fears were not warranted.

Twenty states and Washington, D.C. now have effective medical marijuana laws. In 15 of the states, government surveys have produced before-and-after data on teens’ marijuana use. In 10 states, the data shows overall decreases, most of which were within confidence intervals. No state with a statistically significant change saw an increase in teens’ marijuana use.

Several other researchers and health experts have examined the data over the past few years and have also found the data to be reassuring. Dr. Seth Ammerman published an article in the Winter 2011 edition of *California Pediatrician*, finding, “Medical Marijuana for adults in all states that have approved medical marijuana, with one exception, has not led to an increase in recreational marijuana use in adolescent populations.”¹ (Since then, new data has come out in that state — Michigan — and the change is no longer outside of the confidence interval.)

Here is a review of the most comprehensive data on teens’ current (past 30-day) marijuana use in each of the medical marijuana states. In all but four of the states, the data included is for all high schoolers. In those states for which data is not available for all high schoolers, this instead includes data from the oldest grade with before-and-after data: 11th grade in California and Oregon and 12th in Washington. The only “before-and-after” data for Colorado was a small survey of 12-17 year olds that does not control for age.

State	Pre-Law Current Use Rates	Most Recent Use Rates	Trend?	Data Source
California (1996)	25.9% (1995/1996)	24.2% (2009/2010)	decrease (not statistically significant)	California Student Survey
Alaska (1998)	28.7% (1995)	21.2% (2011)	decrease	The Centers for Disease Control’s (CDC’s) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)
Oregon (1998)	21% (1998)	20.6% (2011)	decrease (changed survey)	Oregon Public Schools Drug Use Survey & Oregon Healthy Teens

¹Ammerman, Seth, M.D. “Medical Marijuana: Update for the Pediatrician,” *California Pediatrician*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter 2011): 11-13 available at <http://www.aap-ca.org/news/caPed/California Pediatrician - Winter 2011.pdf>

State	Pre-Law Current Use Rates	Most Recent Use Rates	Trend?	Data Source
Washington (1998)	28.7% (1998)	26.7% (2012)	decrease (changed survey)	Washington State Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors & Healthy Youth Survey
Maine (1999)	30.4% (1997)	21.2% (2011)	decrease	The CDC's YRBSS
Hawaii (2000)	24.7% (1999)	21.9% (2011)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Nevada (2000)	25.9% (1999)	20% (2009)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Colorado (2000)	10.3% (1999)	10.72% (2010-2011)	increase (within confidence interval)	National Survey on Drug Use & Health
Vermont (2004)	28.2% (2003)	24.4% (2011)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Montana (2004)	23.1% (2003)	21.2% (2011)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Rhode Island (2006)	25% (2005)	26.3% (2011)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
New Mexico (2007)	26.2% (2005)	27.6% (2011)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Michigan (2008)	18.0% (2007)	18.6% (2011)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
New Jersey (2010)	20.3% (2009)	21.1% (2011)	increase (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Arizona (2010)	23.7% (2009)	22.9% (2011)	decrease (within confidence interval)	The CDC's YRBSS
Delaware (2011)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			
Connecticut (2012)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			
Massachusetts (2012)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			

State	Pre-Law Current Use Rates	Most Recent Use Rates	Trend?	Data Source
New Hampshire (2013)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			
Illinois (2013)	No "after" data available, law is too new.			

This data should put to rest claims that removing criminal penalties from seriously ill patients' medical use of marijuana increases teens' marijuana use.