



ILCAAAP

Illinois Church Action on Alcohol & Addiction Problems

Marijuana Alert - January 18, 2023



Legalized marijuana comes at hidden costs to our youths

Irrespective of where the public stands regarding the decriminalization or legalization of the adult use of nonmedical marijuana, our concern is with the impacts on adolescents, as the loosening of these laws inevitably conveys to them that marijuana is not harmful. In reality, it can be harmful if used during development when it is most likely to impair mental and physical functioning, especially given the intense potency of today's marijuana.

In Illinois alone, marijuana sales reached \$1.5 billion last year. And although these laws are intended to limit legal access to adults, they pose substantial risks to children and teens in the absence of appropriate safeguards.

What is clear is the dramatic increase in young adult use. Brain science tells us development continues until the late 20s, so marijuana also has the potential to adversely influence young adults' health outcomes and risk for addiction. Additional studies of the effects of legal permissibility on risks for imminent adolescent use are finding a growing trend toward normalization of use, ease of access, and less likelihood of a belief that marijuana is harmful, despite scientific evidence that use during adolescence is detrimental to physical and mental health.

Indeed, we are already witnessing a growing national trend across all age groups reflective of broader normalization of marijuana use and a significant uptick in several serious negative consequences, such as instances of marijuana-related prenatal exposure, unintentional childhood ingestion and poisoning, mental health problems, alterations in the developing reproductive system,

marijuana use disorder, car crashes and other indicators of poor life functioning.

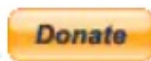
Although these effects are particularly consequential during adolescence, most people are unaware of the many ways that wide access to marijuana products — which are now used in far more potent forms than in the past — can harm young people. In fact, the public receives a great deal of confusing, inaccurate and politically charged rhetoric from both sides of the legalization debate, especially from marijuana industry-funded interests. As is true of tobacco and alcohol, the marijuana industry's profit-driven motives are at odds with public health. Correcting misinformation is critical to protecting our youth. Misconceptions about the risk of marijuana use among adolescents are strongly associated with its use, i.e., the more adolescents perceive that the harms are negligible, the more likely they are to partake.

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