

The Marijuana Problem DCs Need to Address

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Depending on [which survey](#) you read, between half and two-thirds of your adult patients have tried marijuana in some form, and about 25 percent are regular users.¹ While most of us would like to think our nondrug philosophy impacts our patients' cannabis choices, that's probably wishful thinking.

Currently, 10 states plus the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana (not including Illinois, which recently voted for legalization beginning Jan. 1, 2020). In 10 states, its use is still illegal, but the remaining states have adopted legislation for medical provision, decriminalization or both. [Tax revenues](#) are the obvious incentives for most states. In 2018, the state of Washington led with \$319 million in cannabis excise taxes – about \$42 per resident.²

The Impact on Children

A factor often lost in the cannabis legalization headlines is the potential harm on our nation's children. There is agreement that developing adolescent brains are impacted by marijuana use, but to what extent is still largely unknown.

The NIH National Institute on Drug Abuse [estimates](#) that 13.9 percent of 8th graders, 32.6 percent of 10th graders and 43.6 percent of 12th graders have tried marijuana, with about half of those using in the past month.³ These figures will no doubt increase with legalization.

Even before their country's own national legalization in October 2018, Canadian researchers were already involved in deciphering how cannabis impacts adolescent brain development. And while it will be decades before the effects are well-understood, several papers presented at the 2019 Canadian Neuroscience Meeting in Toronto on May 25, 2019 are shedding some light.⁴

The report notes that "adolescence is a highly vulnerable period for the development of the brain as it represents a critical period wherein regulatory connection between higher-order regions of the cortex and emotional processing circuits deeper inside the brain are established. The adolescent brain will undergo maturation of cognitive functions such as working memory, decision-making, and impulsivity control. This period of strong remodeling means adolescents are highly vulnerable to drug-related developmental disturbances."

Of the studies presented, one of the more relevant is a four-year assessment of cannabis and alcohol use conducted by the Université de Montréal's Dr. Patricia Conrod. Dr. Conrod sampled "5% of all students entering high school in 2012 and 2013 in the Greater Montreal region (a total of 3,826 7th grade students)." The researchers found cannabis use was "linked to impairments in working memory and inhibitory control, which is required for self-control. Cannabis use was also linked to deficits in memory recall and perceptual reasoning."

These are not the first studies to reveal the potential dangers of cannabis on children; they are just some of the most recent. Sadly, studies like these will likely get lost in the dust as states and investment groups clamber to get their respective pieces of the marijuana pie.

As a doctor and teacher of health and wellness, you can provide important information and guidance to parents that will help them protect their children from the potential harm of all drugs, including marijuana. Please share this and related information with your patients.

Keep up the great work!

Editor's Note: Bear in mind that CBD, which has quickly gained popularity in health care circles, is clearly differentiated from marijuana courtesy of its THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content. CBD contains little to no THC, the psychoactive compound responsible for the "high" marijuana users experience.

References

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