Understanding the Youth Risks of Colorado's Marijuana

Marijuana can be consumed by smoking, "vaping," or eating foods and beverages that contain THC, the mind-altering chemical found in marijuana.

**Today's Marijuana is Extremely Strong**

The THC levels are significantly higher than the marijuana from the past. Smoked marijuana can contain a 30% THC level and marijuana concentrates can be up to 90%.¹

**Marijuana can be addictive, both psychologically and physically, with adolescents at greater risk**

1 in 6 adolescents become addicted to marijuana compared to 1 in 11 adults.²

Marijuana, not alcohol, is the number one reason adolescents are admitted to substance abuse programs. Arapahoe House, one of Colorado's largest detox centers, has seen a "66 percent increase in teen marijuana admissions from 2011 to 2014".³

Marijuana is particularly harmful to adolescents and young adults, as the human brain is still developing.⁴

Recent studies highlight the risks:

- Early and persistent marijuana use can cause up to an 8 point drop in I.Q.⁵
- Regular use impairs learning, memory, math and reading achievement, even 28 days after use.⁴
- Adolescents who regularly consumed marijuana experienced a threefold increase in the likelihood of psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia in adulthood.⁶
- Marijuana use may be associated with depression, anxiety or suicidal thoughts.⁷

**Marijuana in any form is against Colorado law for those under 21 years of age**

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1. LaFate, Andy, PhD. Findings presented at the 249th American Chemical Society National Meeting & Exposition. Denver (March 23, 2015).
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Frequent Youth Questions

Q: But if it’s legal, doesn’t that make it safe?

A: Just because it’s legal, doesn’t mean it’s safe. For example, cigarettes are legal, but they are known to be addictive, cause birth defects, and lead to cancer. That’s one reason marijuana is not legal for those under the age of 21. By that time, the state hopes you can fully weigh the risks and make a good decision.

Q: But you smoked marijuana when you were younger?

A: Today’s marijuana is much stronger than the marijuana from my youth. If it’s true: But, even so, I know that when I smoked marijuana, my judgment was impaired and the only thing that prevented me from getting into bad situations as a result was luck. If not true: Actually, I never smoked weed when I was younger because I knew it would have interfered with the things I enjoyed and my future.

Q: Isn’t weed safer than alcohol?

A: Both are harmful and not legal for someone your age. It’s important that you not do things that are risky to ensure a great future.

Q: Marijuana is just a plant. If it’s natural, how can it be harmful?

A: Not everything that’s natural is good for you. A great example is tobacco—it’s also a plant, but we all know tobacco is very dangerous and addictive.