Marijuana’s Impact on Public Health

Enclosed are data and information on the public health impact of possible legalization and commercialization of recreational marijuana in Illinois.
Marijuana’s Impact on Youth

▶ An American Journal of Psychiatry article reports that marijuana may pose greater risk to teenagers’ brains than alcohol. Marijuana had significant, short and long-term impacts on four key cognitive areas: problem solving, long-term memory, short-term memory manipulation and the ability to stop a habitual behavior when needed. The study could not link alcohol to these negative effects.¹

▶ This study also found young people who used marijuana frequently did worse than non-users on memory tests, learning and higher-level thinking involving problem solving and processing information.¹

Youth with past-month marijuana use were:⁵
▶ 10 times more likely to report past-month use of other illicit drugs (e.g., cocaine, hallucinogens, heroin, and inhalants and non-medical use of prescription pain relievers, sedatives, and stimulants)
▶ 6 times more likely to report past-month alcohol use
▶ 8 times more likely to report past-month binge drinking
▶ 16 times more likely to report past-month heavy drinking
▶ 9 times more likely to report past-month cigarette use

BOTTOM LINE:
Youth who used marijuana in the past month were much more likely to use cigarettes and alcohol, to binge drink, to drink heavily and use other illicit drugs compared to youth who did not use marijuana in the past month.⁵

“As marijuana availability has risen with increasing legal and social acceptance, it becomes a public health imperative to examine factors that increase marijuana use including alcohol and tobacco (nicotine) as well as other illegal [drugs] for youth.”
– DuPont et al

Youth who never used marijuana in their lifetime reported far lower lifetime rates of all non-medical drug use, including cigarette, non-marijuana illicit drug use (e.g., cocaine, hallucinogens, heroin, and inhalants and non-medical use of prescription pain relievers, sedatives, and stimulants), and alcohol.⁵

BOTTOM LINE:
Marijuana is a gateway drug to other drugs for American youth.⁵

References:
Marijuana’s Impact on Public Health

Marijuana is addictive according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. About 9 percent of adult users are affected, but teenagers have nearly double the chance of becoming addicted—more than 17 percent if they start as adolescents.6

Marijuana and the Opioid Crisis
Two studies indicate that marijuana may not be the solution to the opioid crisis:

“Cannabis use was common in people with chronic non-cancer pain who had been prescribed opioids, but we found no evidence that cannabis use improved patient outcomes. People who used cannabis had greater pain and lower self-efficacy in managing pain, and there was no evidence that cannabis use reduced pain severity or interference or exerted an opioid-sparing effect.”7

“The opioid crisis appears to be worsening where marijuana has been legalized, despite fewer opioid prescriptions... In any event, before other states rush to legalize marijuana and risk worsening the opioid crisis, the marijuana-opioid interaction should be more definitively researched.”8

Marijuana’s Impact on Mental Health
There is moderate to substantial evidence of a statistical association between cannabis use and:

- Development of schizophrenia
- Increased risk for the development of depressive disorders
- Increased incidence of suicide ideation and suicide attempts
- Increased incidence of suicide completion
- Increased incidence of social anxiety with regular cannabis use

Marijuana’s Impact on Maternal and Child Health
Given the concern for potential adverse effects on the fetus with maternal cannabis use, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends against the use of cannabis products in pregnant women.

Despite this recommendation, marijuana is being used by pregnant women, sometimes on the advice of marijuana dispensaries.

Adverse effects on the fetus can include: fetal growth restriction, low birth weight, greater need for intensive care for infants and long-term neurological consequences.9

In a study of 400 Colorado dispensaries, 69% incorrectly recommended treatment of morning sickness with cannabis products. The majority (65%) based their recommendation for use in pregnancy on personal opinion and 36% incorrectly stated cannabis use is safe in pregnancy.10

Marijuana’s Track Record in Colorado

- Marijuana-related hospitalizations increased by 236% after retail marijuana sales were legalized in 2014.11
- Marijuana-related emergency room visits increased by 24% after retail marijuana sales were legalized in 2014.11
- 69% of marijuana users admit to driving after using marijuana.12
- Auto crashes are up by 13 percent since legalization, compared with neighboring states that haven’t legalized marijuana for recreational use.13

Since recreational marijuana was legalized, marijuana-related traffic deaths increased 151 percent (from 55 in 2013 to 138 people killed in 2017) while all Colorado traffic deaths increased 35 percent.12

For every dollar in tax revenue Colorado gains from recreational marijuana purchases, an additional $4.50 is being spent to combat public health and safety issues.14

Various Health Effects of Marijuana Use.15
- Difficulty thinking, making decisions, and solving problems
- Distorted perceptions
- Impaired balance and coordination
- Problems with learning and memory
- Irregular heart rhythms
- Respiratory problems and greater risk of lung infections
- Paranoia
- Acute psychosis, including hallucinations, delusions and loss of identity

References (continued):
Youth who used marijuana in the past month were much more likely to use other substances.†

*m Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) requires that any description of overall sample sizes based on the restricted-use data files has to be rounded to the nearest 100 to minimize potential disclosure risk.


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