

Marijuana

Marijuana in New Mexico: Youth Impact, Legal Status, and Regulation

Marijuana use poses significant risks to youth and adults in New Mexico. This issue brief aims to inform the discussion about marijuana legalization based on research on marijuana and legal drugs, i.e., alcohol and tobacco.

Why the Concern for Marijuana Use and Youth?

Research conducted over the past decades has shown clear linkages between youth marijuana use and these public health harms.³

- *Addiction*
- *Lower IQ*
- *Higher Risk for Psychosis, Depression and Anxiety*
- *More Likely to Drop Out of High School and College*



How Serious are the Risks of Marijuana Use for Youth?

Addiction:

About 9% of all people who use marijuana become addicted. This number increases to about 17% among those who start young. (National Institutes of Drug Abuse Research Report Series on Marijuana. Publication Number 15-3859, 2014)

Lower IQ:

Several studies support that people who begin smoking marijuana heavily (27 days out of 30) in their teens and continue to adulthood lose an average of 8 points in IQ between age 13 and 38. The lost cognitive abilities are not fully restored in those who quit smoking marijuana as adults. (National Institutes of Drug Abuse Research Report Series on Marijuana. Publication Number 15-3859, 2014)

Higher risk for psychosis, depression and anxiety:

Adolescent marijuana use has been correlated with psychosis or schizophrenia, especially in teens with family history of the disorder. Frequent marijuana use in adolescence predicts depression and anxiety disorders later in life, with daily users carrying the highest risk. Younger age of initiation increases the risk of developing all of these mental health disorders later in life. (University of Washington Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute, 2013)

More Likely to Drop Out of High School and/or College:

Teens who smoke marijuana daily are significantly less likely to complete high school or attain a degree at college than those who never smoke. Teens who smoke daily are also significantly more likely develop marijuana dependency as an adult. (Young adult sequelae of adolescent cannabis use: an integrative analysis. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, September 2014)

Current Prevalence of Youth Marijuana Use in New Mexico

Early Initiation

New Mexico has the **highest percent** of youth reporting use of marijuana use before the age of 13. 17% of high school youth in New Mexico and 9% of all US high school youth report smoking marijuana for the first time before the age of 13 (CDC YRBS 2013).

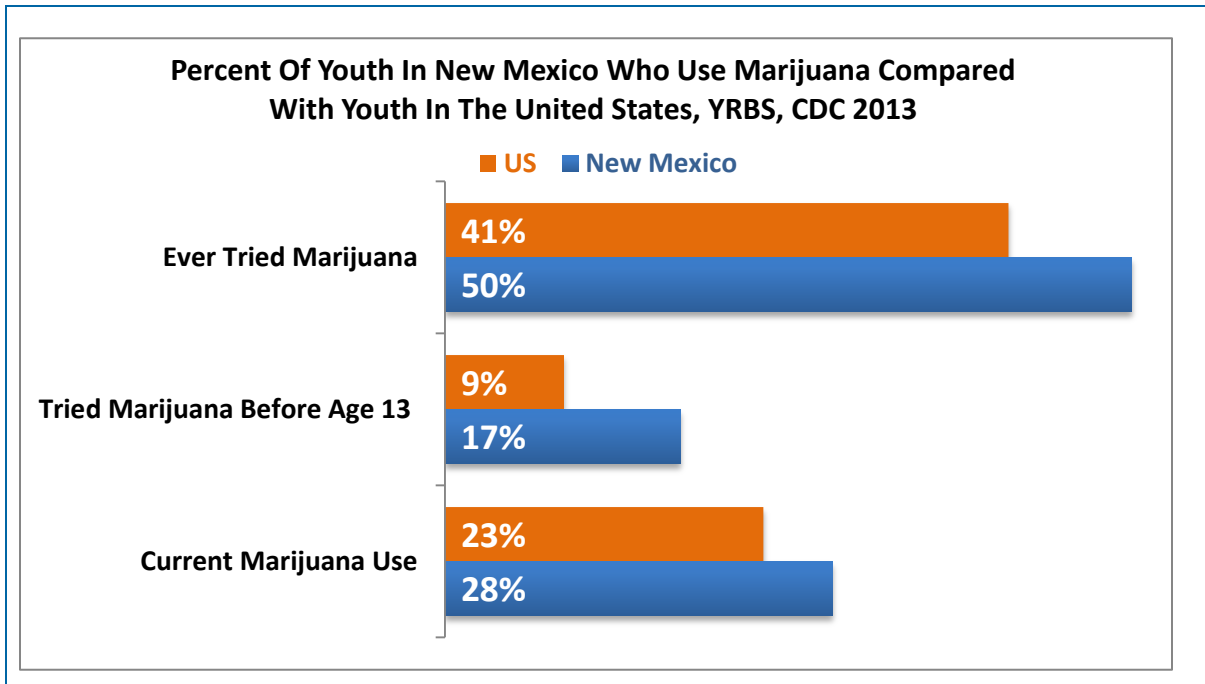
Current Youth Marijuana Use

New Mexico has the **highest percent** of high school youth reporting current marijuana use. 28% of high school youth in New Mexico and 23% of all US high school youth report using marijuana in the past month (CDC YRBS 2013).

Daily Marijuana Use by Youth

6.5% of 12th graders in the US report using marijuana daily. (Monitoring the Future Study, 2013)

Prevalence of Marijuana Use Among Youth in New Mexico



YOUTH MARIJUANA USE IN NEW MEXICO

This graph compares the percentage of high schools students in New Mexico who report using marijuana with youth in the United States.

(Youth Risk and Behavior Survey, CDC 2013)

Legalization of Marijuana will Likely Increase Youth Marijuana Use

- Legalization is likely to increase the already substantial proportion of teens that use marijuana regularly, thus putting themselves a competitive disadvantage in school and life. (NIDA, August 2014)
- Legalizing marijuana would significantly decrease the price of the drug and lead to an increase in use, abuse and addiction. One RAND Corporation Study reports that marijuana legalization would cause up to a 50% increase in use. (*Altered State? Assessing How Marijuana Legalization in California Could Influence Marijuana Consumption and Public Budgets*, RAND Drug Policy Research Center, 2010)
- A community norm where marijuana use is more acceptable and consumed publicly may increase the perception that marijuana is not harmful and may even be beneficial.
- Increased availability of marijuana through legal outlets will likely increase youth access, thereby increasing use.
- Advertising will encourage use.

What Evidence-Based Practices Could Help Protect New Mexico Youth if Marijuana is Legalized?

If marijuana laws and rules are implemented based on international, evidence-based best practices and a commitment to continuously improve those practices, many negative outcomes for youth might be avoided or mitigated. Examples of these practices include:

- Appropriate taxation dedicated to treatment, prevention and enforcement
- Sufficient and timely treatment resources
- Strict controls on advertising and promotion
- Limits on potency and amounts sold per purchase
- Limited sales outlets, preferably state controlled (monopoly)
- Mandatory server/sales training
- Strong enforcement of laws against drugged driving, sales/service to minors and youth possession
- Bans on use in public places to address secondhand intoxication, smoke exposure and norms.

If legalized marijuana laws and rules are implemented without full regard for these evidence-based practices, we believe adverse outcomes are almost guaranteed. Unintended consequences must be considered, especially those impacting our most vulnerable citizens, our youth. We can work together to find ways to protect our youth and our communities.