



*It's No Big Deal...Or Is It?*

# **THE TRUTH ABOUT POT**

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**“It’s no big deal,”** is one of my favorite lines when it comes to the discussion about marijuana. It is almost as if most parents expect their kids to experiment with it.

However, the facts don’t seem to support the blatant lack of concern over “pot smoking.” This document brings to light the facts surrounding marijuana. You may be surprised at what you learn.

**The world has changed, and so has pot.**

**Is it a big deal? You be the judge...**

**“Pot” is the gateway to addiction.”**

Carla Brandt, Vice President  
ROBBY’S VOICE

## Marijuana Myths and Facts

### The Truth Behind 10 Popular Misperceptions Office of National Drug Control Policy

#### Introduction and Facts

- Marijuana is **the most widely used illicit drug in the United States**. 95 million Americans age 12 and older have tried “pot” at least once and three out of four illicit drug users reported using marijuana within the previous 30 days.
- Use of marijuana and other drugs usually **peaks in the late teens and early twenties**, then declines in the later years.
- **Fewer teens report seeing much danger in use, even regular use, of marijuana**. Only 57% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 46% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders (2010) perceive marijuana smoking as harmful, and disapproval among 8<sup>th</sup> graders continues to fall.
- The 2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) showed a **19% increase in marijuana usage in teen’s grade 9 through 12** between 2008 and 2009 demonstrating the acceptability of drug use.

#### MYTH 1 – Marijuana is harmless

#### Potency

- The average amount of **THC has reached 10.1% compared to 4% in 1983** and 1% in 1973. Some strands contain 15% to 20% THC and new resin preparations have up to 30%.
- According to Operation Street Smart, Canadian strands of cannabis have tested at up to 50% THC.
- Conclusion - **Today's Pot is 10 to 50 times more potent than the early 1970's**

### Cognitive Impairment

- Use of the drug can lead to significant health, safety, and learning or behavioral problems, especially for young users.
- A NIDA funded study at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, is part of the growing body of research documenting cognitive impairment among heavy users. The study found that college students who used marijuana regularly had **impaired skills related to attention, memory, and learning 24 hours** after they last used the drug.
- According to NIDA, marijuana affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, making it difficult to judge distance and react to road signals for **up to 24 hours**.
- Another study conducted at the University Of Iowa College Of Medicine found that people who used marijuana frequently (seven or more times weekly for an extended period of time) showed **deficits in mathematical skills and verbal expression**

### Mental Health Problems

- Smoking marijuana leads to changes in the brain **similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin, and alcohol**. All of these drugs disrupt the flow of chemical neurotransmitters, and all have specific receptor sites in the brain that have been linked to feelings of pleasure and over time addiction.
- Particularly for young people marijuana use can lead to **increased anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and other mental health problems**.
- One study linked social withdrawal, panic attacks, depression, attention problems, and thoughts of suicide. Other studies show that kids 12-17 who smoke marijuana weekly are three times as likely as non-users to have **thoughts about committing suicide**

### Traffic Safety

- A study done by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported even a moderate dose of marijuana was shown to **impair driving performance**.
- See “cognitive impairment” above

### Long Term Consequences

- The consequences of marijuana can last long after the effects have worn off. Studies show that early use of marijuana is **strongly associated with later use of other illicit drugs** and with a greater risk of illicit drug dependence.

- Regular marijuana use has been shown to be associated with other long-term problems, including poor academic performance, poor job performance, and increased absences from work.

### MYTH 2 – Marijuana is not addictive

- **More Teens are in treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence** than all other illicit drugs combined.
- Marijuana use in fact is often associated with behavior that meets the criteria for substance dependence established by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.
- According to the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, **4.3 million Americans were classified with dependence on or abuse of marijuana.**
- Many people use marijuana even though it affects their daily lives. What makes this all the more disturbing is that **marijuana use has been shown to be three times more likely to lead to dependence among adolescents than adults.**

### MYTH 3 – Marijuana is not as harmful as tobacco

- People who use marijuana on a regular basis often have the same breathing problems as tobacco users, such as **chronic coughing and wheezing, more frequent acute chest illnesses, a tendency toward obstructed airways.**
- Researchers found that the daily smoking of relatively small amounts of marijuana (3-4 joints) has at least a comparable if not greater effect on the respiratory system than the **smoking of more than 20 tobacco cigarettes.**
- The California EPA, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment lists marijuana smoke on its **cancer causing toxicity list.**
- A 2007 Canadian study found marijuana smoke contained significantly higher levels of toxic compounds than tobacco. Ammonia levels were 20 times higher while cyanide and nitric oxide were 3 to 5 times higher in marijuana smoke.
- According to the 2009 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), of the **973,591 emergency department visits related to illicit drugs, 376,467 involved marijuana (second to cocaine).**

- The French National Consumers Institute reports smoking three cannabis joints has the same amount of toxic chemicals as a whole pack of cigarettes (Seven times more tar and carbon monoxide than cigarette smoke).
- Marijuana smoke contains more than 400 chemicals

“It is time to explode the myth of cannabis as a soft drug.”

Antonio Maria Costa

Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

#### MYTH 4 – Marijuana makes you mellow

- Research shows that kids who use marijuana weekly are nearly four times more likely than non-users to report they **engage in violent behavior**.
- According to the study, incidences of physically attacking people, stealing, and destroying property **increased in proportion** to the number of days marijuana was smoked in the past year.

#### MYTH 5 – Marijuana is used to treat cancer and other diseases

- The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970 established marijuana as a Schedule I controlled substance that labels it a **dangerous drug**.
- **Marijuana as a smoked product has never proven to be medically beneficial** and in fact is much more likely to harm one’s health; marijuana smoke is a crude THC delivery system that also sends many harmful substances into the body.
- Marinol is the FDA approved drug to help with cancer where it uses Synthetic THC.
- The best available evidence points to the conclusion that the adverse effects of marijuana smoke on the respiratory system would almost certainly offset any possible benefit.

### MYTH 6 – Marijuana is not as popular as MDMA (Ecstasy) or other drugs among teens today

- Among kids 12-17, **more than two million reported past month marijuana use**. By contrast fewer than 250,000 young people reported use of hallucinogens and of that number only half 124,000 had used MDMA.
- Marijuana use seems to be increasing while ecstasy use seems to be declining after record increases

### MYTH 7 – If I Buy Marijuana I am Not Hurting Anyone Else Harmless

#### Violence at Home

- The trade in domestically grown marijuana often turns violent when dealers have conflicts or when growers feel their crops are threatened.
- **Most of the marijuana on America's public lands is grown in the vast national forests of California**, where more than 540,000 plants were seized or eradicated on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service in 2003 alone. This figure does not include 309,000 marijuana plants taken from Forest Service land in other states.

#### Sexual Activity

- According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA), teens that use drugs are **five times more likely to have sex than teens that do not use drugs**.

#### Dangerous Import

- Some argue that problems such as these would be solved by simply legalizing marijuana; it's important to remember **the drug is illegal because it causes harm—physical, social, behavioral, and academic—especially to young users**.
- Marijuana causes harm to strangers, families, and overall limits the growth of a person at an educational level all the way up to a professional level.

“The concern on marijuana is not born out of any culture war mentality, but out of what science tells us about the drug’s effects.”

R. Gil Kerlikowske  
ONDCP Director

### MYTH 8 – My kids won’t be exposed to marijuana

- If kids want marijuana they can find it. More than half of youth ages 12-16 responding to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health in 2002 reported that marijuana would be easy to obtain.
- Most marijuana users reported they get it from a friend and almost nine percent of youth who bought marijuana did so **inside a school building**.
- 17% of young people say they have been approached by someone selling drugs
- The 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System survey found that **42 percent of all high school students nationwide had used marijuana at some time in their lives**.
- Analysis of data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse reveals that kids with friends who use marijuana were **30 times as likely** to have used marijuana in the past month. Kids were also nine times more likely to have used marijuana in the last month if they knew adults who used the drug.

#### Not just an Inner-City Problem

- Some people have the impression that kids in the inner city are those most likely to get involved in drugs. However research shows that **marijuana among youth users in cities, suburbs and rural areas is relatively the same**.



### MYTH 9 – There is not much parents can do to stop their kids from experimenting

- Research shows that **appropriate parental monitoring** can reduce future drug use even among adolescents who may be prone to marijuana use, such as those who are rebellious, cannot control their emotions, and experience internal distress.
- In a government survey of youth ages 12-17, almost 90 percent of the respondents thought their parents would strongly disapprove of their trying marijuana once or twice.

#### Parental Involvement

- Experts say that parents try to be home with their kids after school, if possible because evidence indicates the riskiest time for kids with regards to drug involvement is **between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.**
- Experts suggest that it is essential that families participate in activities such as eating meals together, holding meetings in which each person gets to talk, and establishing regular routines.

### MYTH 10 – The government sends otherwise innocent people to Prison for casual marijuana use

- In most states, possession for an ounce or less of marijuana is a misdemeanor offense. Some states have gone so far as to downgrade simple possession of marijuana to a civil offense akin to a traffic violation.
- Many inmates ultimately sentenced for marijuana possession were initially charged with more serious crimes but were able to negotiate reduced charges or lighter sentences through plea agreements with prosecutors.
- On the federal level, prosecutors focus largely on traffickers, kingpins, and other major drug criminals, so federal marijuana cases often involve hundreds of pounds of the drug.
- The fact is, of all drug defendants sentenced in federal court for marijuana offenses in 2001, the vast majority were convicted of trafficking.
- The goal of drug laws is not merely to punish but to reduce drug use and help keep people from harming themselves and others with this destructive behavior.

### Conclusion

- Parents, schools and communities can play an important role keeping children away from marijuana by proper education of the dangers and by monitoring them better.
- Kids can learn the truth about marijuana— [www.freevibe.com](http://www.freevibe.com)
- For more good information check out [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov), [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com)

### ODADAS Facts on Marijuana according to data from June 2011

- Marijuana remains highly available throughout all regions. Nearly every respondent talked about the ubiquitous availability of marijuana, and participants said they can easily obtain the drug at any time of the day and in any location. Six of the eight regions experienced stable availability of marijuana during the past six months
- The most common route of administration remains smoking, with a minority of users baking marijuana into food. Some users in Athens, Cleveland and Toledo also reported vaporization of marijuana. According to these participants, this process is most popular among those with financial means because of the high cost of the vaporizers.
- Use of marijuana appears to be a far-reaching problem that affects all age groups, races and socio-economic backgrounds. When asked about the typical user, respondents most often said, “everyone” uses marijuana. Age of first use was most commonly reported as 12-14 years throughout regions; however, treatment providers in Dayton reported age of first use as nine to 10 years.
- While nearly every drug is used with marijuana, participants reported that the drugs most often used in combination with marijuana are alcohol, crack cocaine, and powdered cocaine (aka “primo” or “woolie”).

### QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- Do you feel safe driving with people high on pot on the road as well?
- Would you let your kids drive with someone high on pot?
- Do you really still think “pot is no big deal?”

#### SOURCES:

Data compiled from reports published by the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Ohio Department of Alcohol, Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS) and the Federal Drug Enforcement Agency