

Increase Your Awareness: Edible Marijuana Use

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug by teens (Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey). With the legalization of marijuana in several states, our youth have received some mixed messages from society that has led to misconceptions over the harm that marijuana has on developing adolescents. While marijuana is not legal in any state for adolescent use, the changes in legislation across our country have created an environment in which marijuana increasingly is seen as acceptable, safe, and therapeutic (American Academy of Pediatrics). In fact, perception data tells us that the number of young people who believe marijuana use is risky is decreasing (Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey). The changes we have seen in marijuana over the last decade increases the need to provide up-to-date information and education to our youth on marijuana use. According to the Partnership for Drug Free Kids, “The drug landscape will continue to change with the times, but the one thing that will remain constant is the need for support and information when raising a child”.



Not only is marijuana more potent than it was when today's parents were growing up, it is also being used in new ways with the intent to get a stronger and longer lasting high. Where legal, marijuana infused food products (edibles) use is becoming nearly as common as smoking marijuana (National Institute on Drug Abuse.) Edibles come in many different forms including brownies, cookies and candies. Candy edibles can come in the form of gummies, candy bars and even the popular sugary candy, pixy stix. Youth may view edibles as a more “attractive” mode of use as it may be easier to disguise (doesn't look or smell like marijuana, no paraphernalia, etc.). The high produced by edible marijuana is often stronger and lasts longer. Unlike smoking marijuana, where the effects can be felt almost immediately, effects from edibles can take 1-2 hours to set in. This is because when ingested, THC, the most potent psychoactive chemical in marijuana is absorbed more slowly into the bloodstream. Someone experimenting with marijuana edibles might not feel the effects as quickly as expected and eat large amounts in an attempt to “get high”. This leads to overdosing. Additionally, the amount of THC can vary in marijuana edible products, making it harder to control how much THC is consumed. The effects of edible marijuana can last anywhere from 4-10 hours depending on the dose, last meal, medications or other substances used at the same time. Edibles in high doses can result in negative effects like anxiety, paranoia and in rare cases, an extreme psychotic reaction (delusions, hallucinations, talking incoherently).

Regardless of how it is used, there are health risks associated with youth marijuana use. When marijuana use begins in the teen years, it can have a significant impact on brain development. THC alters the ability of the hippocampus (a brain area related to learning and memory), to communicate effectively with other brain regions. This can lead to:

- Reduced ability to concentrate
- Impaired or reduced short & long –term memory

- Impaired or reduced comprehension
- Impairments in learning, memory, perception, and judgement.

Compared to those who don't use marijuana, those who use heavily more often report:

- Lower life satisfaction
- Poorer mental health
- Poorer physical health
- More relationship problems

When it comes to substance use, parents play an influential role. Below are some helpful talking points for parents to help guide conversations about marijuana use.

1. Marijuana is not a benign drug for teens. The teen brain is still developing, and marijuana may cause abnormal brain development.
2. Marijuana is addictive. One in six teenagers who use marijuana today will become addicted.
3. Teens who use marijuana regularly may develop serious mental health disorders, including addiction, depression, and psychosis.
4. Recreational use of marijuana by minors and young adults under the age of 21 years is illegal and, if prosecuted, may result in a permanent criminal record, affecting schooling, jobs, etc.
5. Never drive under the influence of marijuana or ride in a car with a driver who is under the influence of marijuana. Adults and teens regularly get into serious and even fatal car accidents while under the influence of marijuana.

For additional information, download the free marijuana talk kit from Partnership for Drug Free Kids: <https://drugfree.org/download/marijuana-talk-kit/>.

References: National Institute on Drug Abuse, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey, Partnership for Drug Free Kids.