

A New Plague on Our Youth



Despite big strides toward legalization, keeping marijuana out of the hands of our youth remains vital.

The US Justice Department issued a statement on August 29, 2013, declaring that they will not interfere with states' rights to implement independent, structured regulatory systems for legalized Mary Jane. This leads some to fear that a new threat to society is upon us. Could our enthusiastic approach toward the substance most commonly associated with the drug war be sending the wrong message? Are we paving the road to America's future with the ambitions of America's youth?

While proponents to end marijuana prohibition take to the streets, rallying for "cannabis friendly" laws, parents tremble behind closed doors. Could this be the beginning of a new epidemic, poisoning the minds of upcoming generations of entrepreneurs and leaders?

Let us begin this discussion with the undeniable fact that not one single death has ever been directly related to the use of marijuana. Though this lends credence to the idea that marijuana is a relatively harmless drug, it does not take into consideration other, surrounding factors of reefer ingestion, which include impaired judgment, impaired motor skills, potential for addiction and other adverse effects. Though these reactions are not common in most cannabis users, there seems to be growing evidence of such cases appearing among teens who began experimentation with marijuana at an early age.

A current misconception among America's youth is leading to the highest percentage of teen marijuana use this nation has ever seen. This misconception lies in the majority consensus that marijuana is not only safe to use, but also has positive effects. Though not completely untrue, there is a level of risk associated with cannabis exposure to a brain that is not yet fully developed.

There is also a lack of understanding about how one can receive many of the beneficial effects of

cannabis, which is based on the consumption of proteins, oils and other nutritional aspects of the hemp plant – and not the ingestion of THC. When you consider the numerous tales of success surrounding medicinal marijuana research and medical cases (<https://motifri.com/meeting-your-child-for-the-first-time>), it is easy to understand where this misconception may come from.

Many of the children who experiment with marijuana do so with the genuine naivete and ignorance that is common among teens, provoked by an inability to fully understand the potential risks and consequences of their actions. This puts adolescents at a high risk for addiction, anxiety, and sociological or developmental disorders.

To understand this, consider not only the obvious social aspects, but also the science behind the development of the adolescent brain. Adolescent brains have well developed rewards centers, allowing them to experience reward and pleasure in the same manner as adults. Unfortunately, the section of the brain that deals with self-control, managing impulses, thinking ahead and organization is not fully developed until age 24*. Coupled with the inability of the adolescent brain to reproduce cannabinoids at the same pace as an adult brain, teen pot smokers tend to seek out alternative methods to replace the depleted cannabinoids. This can naturally lead to repetitive marijuana use, helping to explain the high rate of abuse and addiction in low-age cannabis users.

But it doesn't explain the reasoning behind why more teens are experimenting with marijuana in the first place.

Recent studies, however, have shown that this trend – increased teen marijuana experimentation – is actually moving in the opposite direction in states where marijuana reform has taken effect. I believe that this can be attributed to a willingness to engage in a fact-based and honest conversation with children, rather than using fear tactics and misinformation to discourage drug use. Communication based on honesty and trust encourages healthy growth and communication between youths, authority figures and role models alike.

Based on the simple law of action*, if a concept is supported by concrete facts and examples, the presentation of future concepts will be that much more easily accepted. When these concepts are not supported with concrete evidence, or seem biased, future concepts will be more heavily scrutinized and questioned, provoking rebellious behavior. This is especially true in younger people. In the case of marijuana prohibition, the truth is so simple that it is basically more difficult to fabricate lies. These resulting lies are becoming more and more obvious to a media-aware, information-based generation.

The truth is that *smoking* cannabis is where most of the health dangers lie. There are other, safer methods used to medicate, but those who have not been exposed to a marijuana-friendly society do not commonly know about these. I don't mean to imply that these other methods eliminate the dangers to children. It is my belief that any person under the age of 21 should avoid any drug, at all costs. Though the dangers are fewer at later ages, exposure to any drug can produce adverse effects, especially when used inappropriately or mixed with other substances.

There is a lot more research to be done on this topic. The current federal administration has finally set a precedent that will allow such research to happen – without fear of prosecution – as long as it is done responsibly and with respect for the priorities defined by the law. But as this research develops, we can demonstrate that honesty is the most valuable tool available for protecting our youth.

It is time for lies about marijuana to end. This is a drug that has been used by both presidents and peasants. Artists, philosophers, athletes and world leaders have all admitted to their experiences with cannabis; some have even embraced it as an inspirational factor in their achievements. As parents, we are only hurting ourselves if we continue to hide these facts from our children. Not only that, but we are exposing them to an epidemic more dangerous than weed - an epidemic of lies and deception - the true new world plague.

Sources:

- Office of National Drug Control Policy • Marijuana Myths & Facts • 2012
- NORML • Marijuana Health Mythology • Dale Gieringer, Ph.D. • June, 1984
- CNN • Weed • Dr. Sanjay Gupta • 8/11/2013