THC & TEENS

What Every Trusted Adult Should Know

candor health education

As attitudes toward marijuana continue to shift and access to THC products becomes easier, many adults are left wondering what this means for young people. Understanding what THC is, how teens are accessing it, and why use of THC by adolescents is particularly concerning can help families have informed conversations and promote healthy decision-making.

In this newsletter, we'll define THC, explore how teens are obtaining it, discuss the risks associated with adolescent use, and share practical prevention strategies for parents and caregivers.

What is THC?

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is one of the main chemicals found in marijuana. THC can make someone feel high, light-headed, giggly, and relaxed. For others, THC can make them feel paranoid and anxious, particularly when used in a concentrated form.

Where and How are Underage Users Accessing THC?

According to the national Monitoring the Future Survey, more than one-quarter of 12th graders report using marijuana within the past year. Most youth who use marijuana report obtaining it from friends or from individuals selling it, either in person or online.

An increasing number of teens are also using cannabis-derived products made from the hemp plant. Although hemp is legal, manufacturers can chemically alter hemp compounds to produce intoxicating substances that may bypass some state and federal regulations. One intoxicating derivative of the hemp plant is Delta-8-tetrahydrocannabinol (Delta-8), which 9% of 12th graders report using within the last year (Monitoring the Future Survey).

Parent & Caregiver Alert:

Many Delta-8 products are packaged to look like popular candies, gummies, sodas, or snack foods, making them difficult to distinguish from ordinary consumer products.







Why is Teen THC Use Especially Concerning?

Today's THC Products are Much Stronger

Today's marijuana products have 5-25 times the amount of THC than they did before the year 2000. These high potency THC products are more likely to produce anxiety, agitation, paranoia, and psychosis. A recent study published in the JAMA Health Forum screened 463,396 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years for cannabis use and found that past-year use was associated with a significantly increased risk of psychotic, bipolar, depressive, and anxiety disorders by age 26.

The Adolescent Brain is Still Developing

The teenage brain continues developing into the mid-20s. THC interacts with receptors throughout the brain and can disrupt normal neural communication. Research shows THC can affect memory, learning, attention and concentration, decision-making, coordination and movement, and sensory and time perception.

Because the brain is still developing, these effects may be more significant and last longer for adolescents than for adults.

Increased Risk of Cannabis Use Disorder

Teens are also at greater risk of developing dependence.

Data from SAMHSA's 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that among nearly 3 million adolescents aged 12-17 who used marijuana in the past year, approximately 44% met criteria for cannabis use disorder, representing more than 1.3 million youth struggling with problematic use.

For additional resources:
https://johnnysambassadors.org/
https://candorhealthed.org/parent-information/family-resources/substance-use-prevention-resources/marijuana-information/

Ways to talk to your child about THC products & strategies for prevention

- **Arm yourself with facts –** By reading this newsletter and exploring some of the additional links below, you are well on your way.
- **Be approachable and initiate conversations on this topic –** Teens often become defensive when they think a lecture is coming. Talking while in the car and using real-life situations are some ways to bring up the subject. Keep the conversations casual and ongoing.
- **Ask them what they know –** With social media & the internet at their fingertips, chances are they may be seeing references to marijuana more than you think, & these vehicles often glamorize it.
- **Establish Clear Rules –** Setting clear, specific rules is the foundation for the parental effort in prevention. Create the rules with your child and enforce them consistently.
- **Know Their Friends –** Pay attention to who your child is hanging out with and take the opportunity to introduce yourself to their parents.
- **Be their way out –** Let your child know that they can call you anytime to come get them or when in a peer pressure situation. They can use you as an excuse. Consider creating a "code word" that they can text you when they need a quick exit.

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Chicago High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas