

Marijuana: Separating Facts From Fiction

The following research is intended to be a brief snapshot of the current marijuana debate. As many as a dozen states may consider marijuana legalization through the legislature or ballot box in 2016 so it's important to know the facts surrounding this deceptively dangerous drug.

History — A Growing Effort

- As of 2015, every state with legalized recreational marijuana started with legalizing pot for medical purposes.
- Colorado and Washington state both legalized recreational marijuana in 2012.
- Alaska and Oregon approved recreational marijuana in 2014; the District of Columbia legalized recreational marijuana in early 2015.
- As many as fourteen states are now poised to consider legalization in 2016, including: South Dakota, Florida, Massachusetts, Nevada, California, New York, New Mexico, Minnesota, Connecticut, Maryland, Vermont, Rhode Island, Maine and Michigan.

Colorado became one of the first states to legalize recreational marijuana in 2012. Voters were told that legalization would make available a harmless, revenue-producing substance that would not make its way into the hands of children. **However, the facts reveal the opposite, with significant negative psychological, legal, and social effects throughout the state and beyond.**

Those Who Support Legalization Claimed:

- Marijuana is a safe, non-addicting drug.
- The state would receive large revenues from taxation.
- Legalization will reduce the black market.
- Marijuana smokers are calm, docile and unlikely to cause an increase in crime.
- Strict regulations will keep marijuana out of the hands of children and underage teenagers.

Opponents Of Legalization Countered:

- This is not the same pot popularized in the 1970's — today's marijuana is much more potent, addicting and dangerous.
- Increased costs of enforcement and other social problems will swallow up any tax profits.
- High state taxes, plus profit margins at dispensaries means that black-market sources of the drug will still be the less-expensive option.
- Individuals who are high on marijuana are dangerous behind the wheel of a car.

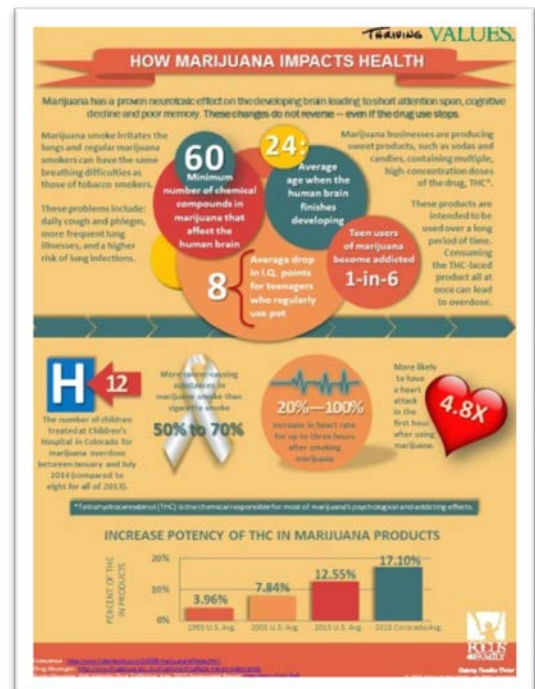


Image 1: Health Effects of Marijuana
(Click Image to View Larger)

- The risk of youth using the drug will increase if it becomes legalized, leading to problems in schools and families.

The Numbers Are In

The most reliable data on the impact of recreational marijuana comes from Colorado. Since legalization, the available statistical data paints a less-than-positive picture.

A Tax On The Economy:

- Colorado officials estimated the state would take in approximately \$100 million in various marijuana tax revenues in its first year (2014).ⁱ
- This included licensing fees for marijuana businesses and a whopping 25-percent worth of sales taxes.
- However, the actual intake was only \$66 million,ⁱⁱ falling short of budget projections and, as a result, law enforcement, hospitals, schools, drug treatment and education programs took a significant financial cut.
 - The \$40 million that was projected to go to schools (based on a 15-percent excise tax) only generated \$13.6 million in 2014.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Additionally, the cost of growing marijuana in warehouses has caused a significant spike in Denver’s energy usage,^{iv} with some growers reporting monthly electric bills near \$40,000.^v This is four times the energy used by hospitals on a per-square-foot basis.^{vi}



Image 2: Colorado’s Road to Recreational Marijuana
(Click Image to View Larger)

Crime On The Increase:

- More than 38 states have reported seizures of Colorado marijuana and marijuana-laced products illegally shipped out of state.^{vii}
 - The U.S. Postal Service interceptions, involving Colorado marijuana bound for other states, have **risen over 2,000 percent**.^{viii}
- The black market continues to thrive: The high taxes which are imposed on legal marijuana sales make the store-bought product more expensive than what can be purchased on the streets.^{ix,x} Some former pot-shop owners are now operating illegally out of their vehicles for greater profit margins than before.^{xi}
- Colorado police and sheriff’s offices have reported a significant increase in the number of drivers testing positive for pot use, as well as an increase in the number of those drivers involved in fatal traffic accidents.^{xii}

Increased Drug Use:

- Americans' consumption of illicit drugs is on the rise,^{xiii} and Colorado's use rates are higher than the national average.^{xiv}
- While some data shows marijuana use among teens remained stable or declined after medical marijuana was legalized — in Colorado, there has been a clear increase in teen pot use after legalizing recreational marijuana.
 - There was an **8-percent increase** just one year after legalization in Colorado, while nationally pot use among teens declined.^{xv}
- School suspensions related to marijuana possession have risen sharply.^{xvi}
- A coalition of sheriffs from Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas are suing the state of Colorado for problems related to the increased cost of enforcement of Colorado's law.^{xvii}
 - The suit also alleges hospital rooms and jails in the neighboring states are "filling up," forcing them to deal with the medical and legal costs associated with increased drug usage.
- Pueblo, Colo. reports a sharp increase in the number of homeless individuals who claim to have traveled to the city in order to access the marijuana available there.^{xviii}

Questions? ThrivingValues@Family.org

If you or a loved one struggles with drug addiction, you can contact us at Focus on the Family's counseling line. To reach Focus on the Family's counseling service by phone, please call 1-800-A-Family (232-6459) on week-days, from 6:00 a.m. — 8:00 p.m. (Mountain Time). Please be prepared to leave your contact information for a counselor or chaplain to return a call to you, as soon as possible. The consultation is available at no cost to you. You may also reach our counselors online by filling out our Counseling Request Form.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/02/12/colorado-s-pot-revenue-goes-up-in-smoke.html>

ⁱⁱ http://www.denverpost.com/election/ci_28803471/ahead-2015-vote-campaign-pushes-marijuana-tax-question

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/revenue/colorado-marijuana-tax-data>

^{iv} http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_28417456/pot-boom-spikes-denver-electric-demand-challenges-clean

^v <http://www.bizjournals.com/denver/print-edition/2015/08/07/colorado-pot-growers-face-sky-high-power-bills.html>

^{vi} <http://evan-mills.com/energy-associates/Indoor.html>

^{vii} <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf>
(page 4)

^{viii} <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf>
(page 4)

^{ix} <http://money.cnn.com/2014/09/02/news/economy/marijuana-taxes-colorado/>

^x <http://denver.cbslocal.com/2015/05/06/pot-delivery-services-thriving-in-colorados-black-market/>

^{xi} <http://www.ibtimes.com/pulse/colorado-marijuana-legalization-2015-fighting-black-market-everyday-challenges-1913431>

^{xii} <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf>
(pages 21-27)

^{xiii} <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends>

^{xiv} <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/chart-colorado-among-states-growing-heroin-prescription-drug-abuse-problem>

^{xv} <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/call7-investigators/report-shows-rising-pot-use-by-colorado-teens-growing-number-of-confiscations-after-legalization>

^{xvi} <http://www.rmhidta.org/html/2015%20FINAL%20LEGALIZATION%20OF%20MARIJUANA%20IN%20COLORADO%20THE%20IMPACT%204.pdf>
(pages 41, 42)

^{xvii} <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/03/05/sheriffs-from-three-states-sue-colorado-over-marijuana/24385401/>

^{xviii} <http://www.chieftain.com/special/marijuana/2168858-120/marijuana-chieftain-homeless-mertz>