

# THE EDUCATOR

A publication of the Drug Free Schools Committee

## Marijuana- Risks for Youth

The federal government classifies marijuana as a Schedule I Controlled Substance and therefore it is illegal. However, 11 states have legalized the adult retail sale of marijuana, and 23 have approved it for medical use. Connecticut is one of the states where medical marijuana is legal.\* With these changes in policy, culture, and increased availability, more and more people are using marijuana. We have seen the impact this has had on attitudes and behaviors of youth.

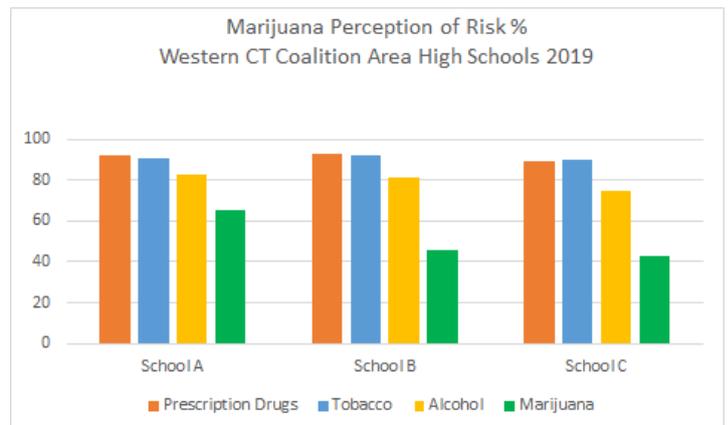
\*For more information on the CT laws pertaining to medical marijuana, visit the Department of Consumer Protection website using this [link](#)

Here is what the data is telling us around the nation and in region 5:

### Marijuana use trends among high school youth in Western CT :

- Past 30-day use of marijuana reported in 2019 was between 16-19%
- Senior class students report rates as high as high as 35-39%
- Vaping marijuana was reported locally as well. In one high school, of the 23% surveyed who reported they vape, 50% said they vaped marijuana

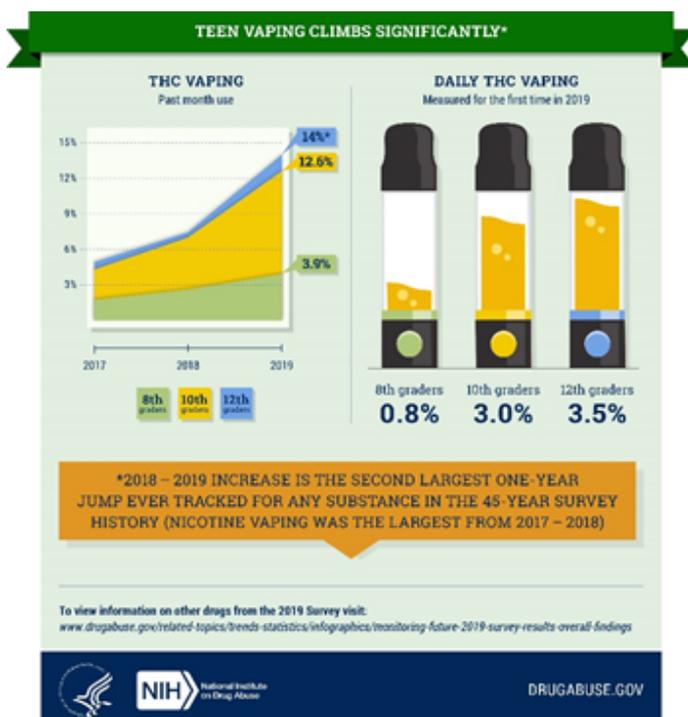
As indicated by the chart below, young people don't think marijuana is as harmful as alcohol, smoking cigarettes or misusing prescription drugs



### Nationwide Data

The graphic on the left is from the 2019 Monitoring the Future survey. It shows that past month marijuana vaping among 12th graders nearly doubled in a single year from 7.5% to 14% –the second largest one-year jump ever tracked for any substance in the 45 year history of the survey.

(The largest was from 2017-2018 with past month nicotine vaping among 12th graders).



Sources: SAMHSA, Search Institute Attitudes and Behaviors Surveys locally, Monitoring the Future Survey, NIH, NIDA, UCLA Health, The Truth Initiative, DEA, New England Journal of Medicine, The College on Problems of Drug Dependence

## Other Marijuana Trends

Today's marijuana is much stronger than it used to be. Tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC is the active ingredient in marijuana that causes intoxication. **The amount of THC found in today's plant-based marijuana can be as high as 30% compared to less than 10% in the 1970's, 80's and 90's.**

Vape devices have become a more common way for youth to use marijuana. Marijuana concentrates in the form of oil or wax, can be vaporized. Vaping marijuana in these devices can be more discreet and creates little odor. Young people may perceive that this type of use is safer, because they are not smoking, but **there is risk of consuming high concentration levels of THC- as high as 80-90% has been reported.**

### No one under the age of 21 should use marijuana

Young people's brains are still developing until the age of 25. Using a substance like marijuana during this critical time of growth and vulnerability is particularly harmful.

### Based on research and scientific evidence, these are the risks to youth who use marijuana:

- **Addiction-** 1 in 6 who start using marijuana as teenagers will become addicted. For those who use daily, the risk of addiction rises to 25-50%. Withdrawal symptoms have been reported by those trying to quit- irritability, difficulty sleeping, and anxiety among them. Another factor is that there is evidence to support that early marijuana use and addiction predicts an increased risk of the use of other illicit drugs.
- **Long-lasting Cognitive Impairments-** those linked to adolescent marijuana use include diminished ability to visually scan, to pay attention, and to control impulses. Parts of the brain that control learning, memory, self-consciousness, inhibition-control and motivation are also impaired. Marijuana use (like alcohol and nicotine use) can prime the adolescent brain for heightened response to other drugs and risky behaviors.
- **Mental Illness-** including an increased risk of developing anxiety disorders and depression as an adult; risk is doubled when a young person uses marijuana weekly. There is a considerable link between marijuana use in youth and psychotic disorders like schizophrenia- especially if there is a pre-existing genetic predisposition to mental illness.



### What can parents do? Talk to your kids....

- Parents have a significant influence over their children's decision to experiment with drugs.
- Its never too early to start conversations about drug and alcohol use. Age of onset for substance use can be as early as 9-10 years old.
- Be direct and be honest. Know the facts.
- When you don't talk about it, kids may get the message that there is no harm in trying drugs like marijuana.
- Get to the root-cause of any substance misuse, encourage healthy coping skills, and if necessary, help them seek appropriate treatment.



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