

MARIJUANA: Things Have Changed

Alaska is the only state where the recreational use of marijuana is legal. Alaska is also the state with the highest rate of marijuana use. We need to fix that.

All experts agree that children should not use marijuana, but:

- The average age of first use has dropped to 16 years; with Natives, 14 years
- Alaska high school students who have tried marijuana: 41% non-Native; 69% Native
- 13% of high school students in Alaska have tried marijuana before age 13
- 8% of middle school students in Alaska started before age 11
- Hundreds of Alaskans are admitted into treatment each year for marijuana abuse, with more than half being under age 18

Marijuana interferes with treatment of alcoholism, mental illness, and prenatal care:

- Alcoholics who also use marijuana have a much harder time stopping drinking; 63% of Alaska Natives in alcohol treatment also abuse marijuana
- The rate of women in Alaska who use marijuana while pregnant is higher than in other states; the rate of use more than doubles for pregnant Alaska Native women
- Mentally ill persons often self-medicate with marijuana, making treatment difficult
- Marijuana has a high potential for users becoming dependent. Marijuana Anonymous has chapters in 29 states. Just like Alcoholics Anonymous does for persons who are addicted to alcohol, Marijuana Anonymous helps persons addicted to marijuana
- Studies show that young people who use marijuana are many times more likely to begin to use other illegal drugs

Alaska marijuana is now a much more potent drug than in the 1960s and 1970s:

- The potency of marijuana increased in the 1980s, and then doubled in the 1990s. Nationwide, the drug is six times stronger now than in the 1970s. And *Alaska-grown* marijuana is twice as strong as the national average
- The people who support marijuana say that we shouldn't be worried about its high potency, because experienced users stop smoking when they get enough of the drug. Maybe this works for long-time users, but not for kids and most other users.
- While marijuana potency doubled in the 1990s, there was a doubling in the number of people who went to hospital emergency rooms because of marijuana. Of those, 40% went to the emergency room for an "unexpected reaction" to marijuana, including thousands of teenagers under 18. The rate of persons in treatment for marijuana abuse or dependence also more than doubled.

It's up to parents and all adults to give up marijuana to protect our kids:

- If a parent uses marijuana, their children are four to five times more likely to do so
- Many high school students get marijuana at home or from a relative or neighbor
- Increasing penalties deters possession by adults, and helps persuade teenagers that using marijuana is risky, thus reducing its availability and use.

Overview of Marijuana Legislation

- Having less than one ounce would be a class B misdemeanor (currently legal at home)
- Having 1-4 ounces would be a class A misdemeanor (currently legal at home)
- Having over 4 ounces is a class C felony (currently having over 1 pound is a felony)
- Class A misdemeanor to possess any amount while driving (same as DUI – can't test marijuana in your system)