



Adult Use Legalization Corresponds With Drop In Teen Marijuana Use

"[L]egalization by some states of marijuana has not been associated with an increase in adolescents' marijuana use."

—National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Nora Volkow, testifying at a 2022 U.S. Senate Health, Education Labor & Pensions Committee hearing.¹

Study after study has found that cannabis policy reforms are not linked to increased rates of marijuana use among adolescents. The Journal of the American Medical Association published a major report analyzing data from more than 1.4 million high school students through 2019.² The researchers found "no significant associations between enactment of RMLs ["recreational" marijuana legalization laws] or MMLs [medical marijuana laws] and marijuana use among high school students."

New data was released in late 2024 and it is even more encouraging, showing decreases in youth cannabis use since states began legalizing and regulating cannabis for adults 21 and older. As the below data tables show, in 19 of the 21 states with before-and-after data, government surveys indicate a decrease in high schoolers' marijuana use rates post-legalization.³

Nationwide, both the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Monitoring the Future survey results show significant drops in youth marijuana use between 2011 and 2023/2024, while half of the country legalized and regulated cannabis for adults. Since states began legalizing cannabis for adults in 2012, MTF data shows 28% to 46% drops in past 30-day marijuana use in the three grades it surveyed — 8th, 10th, and 12th — along with significant drops in the percent of youths reporting "very easy" or "fairly easy" access to marijuana.⁴

National Survey Data on Teen Use & Access Since States Began Legalizing Cannabis

The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, past 30-day marijuana use, national data⁵

The first two state legalization laws were enacted in 2012.

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	23.1%	23.4%	21.7%	19.8%	21.7%	15.8%	17.0%

Monitoring the Future, past 30-day marijuana use, national data⁶

	2011	2024
8th grade	7.2%	4.3%

10th grade	17.6%	9.5%
12th grade	22.6%	16.2%

Monitoring the Future, percent of students finding marijuana "fairly easy" or "very easy" to obtain, national data⁷

	2011	2024
8th grade	37.9%	24.2%
10th grade	68.4%	41.2%
12th grade	82.2%	65.1%

State-By-State Data Post-Legalization, With the Oldest Laws First

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Nov. 2012⁸

	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2021	2023
8 th grade	9.5%	9.4%	7.3%	6.4%	7.2%	2.8%	3.7%
10 th grade	20.0%	19.3%	18.1%	17.2%	17.9%	7.2%	8.4%
12 th grade	26.3%	26.7%	26.7%	26.4%	26.2%	15.9%	16.3%

Colorado Healthy Kids Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Nov. 2012⁹

	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	22.0%	19.7%	21.2%	19.4%	20.6%	13.3%	12.8%

Oregon Healthy Teens Survey & Student Health Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Nov. 2014¹⁰

	2013	2015	2017	2019	2020	2022
8 th grade	9.7%	8.8%	6.7%	7.8%	3.3%	3.1%
11 th grade	20.9%	19.1%	20.9%	20.4%	13.5%	12.0%

Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Nov.

2014¹¹

	2013	2015	2017	2019	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	19.7%	19.0%	21.5%	21.5%	17.9%

California Healthy Youth Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Nov. 2016¹²

	2013-2015	2015-2017	2017-2019	2019-2021
9 th grade	12%	10%	10%	6%
11 th grade	18%	16%	16%	12%

Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use); Youth Health Survey – Law enacted in Nov. 2016¹³

	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	24.5%	24.1%	26.0%	16.6%	18.6%

Maine Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Nov. 2016¹⁴

	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	19.9%	18.8%	22.3%	17.1%	18.4%

Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Nov. 2016¹⁵

	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	19.3%	17.9%	19.8%	16.3%	14.7%

Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in Jan. 2018¹⁶

	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	23.5%	26.5%	19.9%	22.4%

Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) – Law enacted in

Nov. 2018¹⁷

	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	23.7%	21.6%	14.4%	16.7%

Illinois Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in June 2019¹⁸

	2017	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	20.8%	21.8%	15.1%	17.3%

Arizona Youth Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in Nov. 2020¹⁹

	2018	2020	2022	2024
8 th grade	8.1%	5.9%	5.7%	3.8%
10 th grade	17.0%	14.1%	11.0%	7.8%
12 th grade	23.2%	20.7%	17.6%	14.1%

Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in Nov. 2020²⁰

	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	21.1%	19.7%	19.6%

Virginia Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in 2021²¹

	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	17.3%	13.3%	9.5%

New Jersey Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in Nov. 2020 and Feb. 2021²²

	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	20.1%	17.3%	13.6%

New Mexico Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in March 2021²³

	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	27.7%	20.2%	17.4%

New York Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in March 2021²⁴

	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade, survey omits NYC	17.9%	15.4%	12.0%

Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in June 2021²⁵

	2019	2021	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	21.7%	11.1%	14.7%

Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in June 2022²⁶

	2021 (during COVID)	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	15.5%	19.8%

Missouri Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2022²⁷

	2021 (during COVID)	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	16.7%	20.3%

Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey (past 30-day use) — Law enacted in November 2022²⁸

	2021 (during COVID)	2023
9 th - 12 th grade	15.0%	14.4%

States Without Data

Delaware, Minnesota, and Ohio's legalization laws passed in 2023 and do not yet have "after" data.

Conclusion

More than a decade into states legalizing cannabis for adults the data is clear: Legalization does not increase youth cannabis use. Moving cannabis sales from streets and schools to adults-only stores has been accompanied by reduced access and use of cannabis by youth.

On the illegal market, no one is checking IDs before selling marijuana. When and where cannabis is illegal, high schoolers often sell cannabis to their peers.²⁹ In contrast, licensed cannabis stores have overwhelming compliance with age-gating.³⁰ As part of legalization, a portion of cannabis taxes are often directed to education and prevention, such as after-school activities.

-
1. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAbI3VtTAOI>
 2. Anderson DM, Rees DI, Sabia JJ, Safford S. Association of Marijuana Legalization With Marijuana Use Among US High School Students, 1993-2019. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(9):e2124638. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.24638
 3. The "before" year for the only two states with data indicating a post-legalization increase in teens' marijuana use was 2021, a year with major nationwide drops related to COVID-related shutdowns and separation. For every state that had CDC/ Youth Risk Behavior data both before passage and in 2023, that data was used.
 4. Miech, R. A., Johnston, L. D., Patrick, M. E., & O'Malley, P. M. (2025). Monitoring the Future national survey results on drug use, 1975–2024: Monitoring the Future Available at <https://monitoringthefuture.org/results/annual-reports/>
 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991-2023 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/>. Accessed on December 30, 2024. =AK
 6. Miech, R. A., Johnston, et al. Available at <https://monitoringthefuture.org/data/bx-by/>
 7. Miech, R. et al. Available at <https://monitoringthefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/trends-in-availability-8-grade.pdf>, <https://monitoringthefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/trends-in-availability-10-grade.pdf>, <https://monitoringthefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/mtf2023table9.pdf> . <https://monitoringthefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/trends-in-availability-12-grade.pdf>
 8. Washington State Healthy Youth Survey. Healthy Youth Survey Dashboard. Available at <https://www.askhys.net/SurveyResults/DataDashboard/>. Accessed on December 30, 2024.

9. Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment. Healthy Kids Survey Dashboard. Available at <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/healthy-kids-colorado-survey-dashboard/>. Accessed on December 30, 2024. 2011 data at p. 2 of Overview of the 2011 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey: High School: Available at: https://www.coloradoinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Overview_2011-Healthy-Kids-Colorado-Survey.pdf CDC data was only through 2021, during COVID disruptions. It also showed a drop since legalization, from 22% in 2011 to 18% in 2021. The CDC survey also reported a post legalization decrease before COVID. In 2019, 20.1% of high schoolers reported using marijuana in the past 30 days.
10. Oregon Health Authority. Oregon Student Healthy Survey Data 2020 and 2022. Available at: <https://www.bach-harrison.com/SHSDDataPortal/Crosstabs.aspx> Oregon Health Authority. Oregon Healthy Teens Survey Results, 2013-2019. <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BirthDeathCertificates/Surveys/OregonHealthyTeens/Pages/index.aspx>
11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991-2023 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/>. Accessed on December 30, 2024.
12. California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), CalSCHLS Public Dashboards Available at <https://calschls.org/reports-data/public-dashboards/f882f1e2-dfc0-4448-b90b-f49cef6e6d3f/>. CDC data was only through 2019. It also showed a decrease — from 22.9% in 2015 to 17.1% in 2019 among high schoolers.
13. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991-2023 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/>. Accessed on December 31, 2024. Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Results of the Massachusetts Youth Health Survey 2023. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/results-of-the-massachusetts-youth-health-survey-2023/download>. (p. 29) A
14. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991-2023 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/>. Accessed on December 30, 2024.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.
19. Arizona Youth Survey State Report 2024, Available at: www.azcjc.gov/Portals/0/Documents/pubs/AYSReports/2024/2024_AYS_State_Report.pdf p. 12
2018 data: www.azcjc.gov/Portals/0/Documents/pubs/AYSReports/2018/2018_Arizona_Youth_Survey_State_Report.pdf p. 50. CDC data was only through 2021, during COVID disruptions. It found 26.1% of high schoolers reported past-30 day use of marijuana in 2019 and 19.2% in 2021.
20. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991-2023 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/>. Accessed on December 30, 2024 .
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. In 2012, before any states had regulated adult-use cannabis sales, 40% of high schoolers reported knowing a student who sells marijuana at school. "National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XVII: Teens," The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2012, p. 2.
30. Carla J. Berg, Katelyn F. Romm, Alexandria Pannell, Priyanka Sridharan, Tanvi Sapra, Aishwarya Rajamahanty, Yuxian Cui, Yan Wang, Y. Tony Yang, Patricia A. Cavazos-Rehg, Cannabis retailer marketing strategies and regulatory compliance: A surveillance study of retailers in 5 US cities, Addictive Behaviors, Volume 143, 2023, 107696, ISSN 0306-4603, See additional sources at: "Study: Licensed Cannabis Retailers Are Strictly Complying with ID Verification Laws," NORML, April 5, 2023. Available at:

<https://norml.org/blog/2023/04/05/study-licensed-cannabis-retailers-are-strictly-complying-with-id-verification-laws>