

PRESS RELEASE

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MARIJUANA: THE TRUTH HURTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JACKSON (February 4, 2010) – Over the past decade, alcohol and tobacco use among teens has steadily decreased. That's the good news. The bad news is that by the time Jackson County youth have reached the 11th grade, approximately 42 percent of them have used marijuana.ⁱ Additionally, eight percent of Jackson County youth have tried marijuana before the age of 13.ⁱⁱ

Why is alcohol and tobacco use decreasing while marijuana use remains the same, or in some cases increasing? The answer may have to do with education and perception. Increased efforts to educate our youth about the dangers of alcohol use and drinking have had an impact on youth perception. National and state anti-smoking campaigns, along with changes to laws regarding tobacco use, have had a significant impact on the perception of tobacco use. How a person perceives the dangers associated with these behaviors can have a significant impact on their choice to smoke or drink.

The new medical marijuana law and the lack of focus on educating the public about the risks associated with marijuana use may explain why little progress is being made in reducing youth usage. "Most middle and high school students I talk to believe that tobacco is far more dangerous than marijuana," said Shelly Milligan, Program Coordinator for the Breakout Drug Education Program. "Kids have heard so much about how tobacco increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease but don't know that the risks are even greater with regular marijuana use. The lack of knowledge about the dangers of marijuana use and the medical marijuana law has created a perception that marijuana has fewer health risks than tobacco."

According to the American Medical Association, marijuana use:

- produces the same lung damage and cancer risk as smoking five times as many nicotine cigarettes daily (daily equals one to three marijuana cigarettes)
- impairs critical skills related to attention, memory and learning (these deficits persist up to 24 hours after the user stopped feeling high)ⁱⁱⁱ
- creates toxicity in unborn babies
- lowers levels of testosterone and defective or nonfunctional sperm in males
- increases heart rate
- decreases oxygen capacity in the lungs
- creates physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms (associated with heavy daily use)

Aside from health risks, marijuana is often referred to as a "gateway drug" which means that regular marijuana users are more likely to experiment with other drugs. Regular marijuana users typically combine its use with alcohol, which is more hazardous than the use of either marijuana or alcohol alone. Overall, marijuana has negative consequences to an individual's health, the safety of the community and the health care system burdened with their care.

More information about:

Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and its activities, please contact Kelsey Haynes at (517) 796-5133 or via email at khaynes@uwjackson.org
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ⁱ 2008 Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth Survey, Jackson County

ⁱⁱ 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment

ⁱⁱⁱ American Medical Association (2008)