

PRESS RELEASE

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MARIJUANA: THE TRUTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JACKSON (February 1, 2011) – Recently, reports in local media outlets, like the Jackson Citizen Patriot have outlined the ongoing argument over the risks and benefits of medical marijuana. When the voters of Michigan approved a ballot measure to make medical marijuana legal, no one envisioned the battle that would ensue over the use, production and distribution of medical marijuana. There are strong supporters of medical marijuana and there is strong opposition to the use of marijuana for medical purposes.

The medical marijuana debate has ushered in an attitude and perception that marijuana is safe, and in some cases, beneficial to healthy users. However, many studies have shown that marijuana smoke had higher levels of several toxic compounds than cigarette smoking. In a comparison of data from 2008 to 2010 of local Jackson County youth, more teens now think that smoking marijuana is not a high risk.ⁱ

How adolescents perceive the harm associated with marijuana will greatly influence whether or not they choose to use. The term "medical" has created a perception that marijuana has no harmful effects and may be medically beneficial. "I once had a student tell me that he knew someone who was taking marijuana to help his cancer," stated Shelly Milligan, coordinator of the Breakout Drug Education Program. "There [the perception] is the problem."

With state and local focus on moratoriums and medical marijuana cards, what is getting lost is what message our young people are receiving. Let's not forget that 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)
- 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)ⁱⁱ

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 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:

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ⁱ 2008, 2010 Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth Survey, Jackson County

ⁱⁱ American Medical Association (2008)