

Marijuana Facts

Teacher Resource Sheet

- Marijuana is a green, brown, or gray mixture of dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*). Cannabis is a term that refers to marijuana and other drugs made from the same plant. Other forms of cannabis include sinsemilla, hashish, and hash oil. All forms of cannabis are mind-altering (psychoactive) drugs.
- The main active chemical in marijuana is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol). Short-term effects of marijuana use include problems with memory and learning, distorted perception, difficulty in thinking and problem solving, loss of coordination, increased heart rate, and anxiety.
- Marijuana is usually smoked as a cigarette (called a joint) or in a pipe or bong. Marijuana has also appeared in blunts, which are cigars that have been emptied of tobacco/nicotine and refilled with marijuana, sometimes in combination with another drug, such as crack. It can also be mixed into foods or used to brew a tea.
National Institute on Drug Abuse, Marijuana Facts Parents Need to Know, September 2004
- Among 12-17 year olds surveyed as part of the 2009 NSDUH, 7.3% reported past month marijuana use.
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, September 2010
- Contrary to popular belief most teenagers have not used marijuana and never will. Among students surveyed in a yearly national survey, about one in six 10th graders report they are current marijuana users (that is, used marijuana within the past month). Fewer than one in five high school seniors are current marijuana users.
<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/marijuana.htm>
- Adults who first used marijuana before age 12 (21%) were twice as likely as adults who first used marijuana at age 18 or older (10.5%) to be classified as having a serious mental illness in the past year.
<http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k5/MJageSMI/MJageSMI.cfm>
- Approximately 69.8% of eighth graders, 59.5% of tenth graders, and 52.4% of twelfth graders surveyed in 2009 reported that smoking marijuana regularly was a "great risk."
National Institute on Drug Abuse/University of Michigan, 2009 Monitoring the Future Study Drug Data Tables, December 2009
- In recent decades, marijuana growers have been genetically altering their plants to increase the percentage of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main active ingredient in marijuana. The average potency of marijuana has more than doubled since 1998.
National Center for Natural Products Research (NCNPR), Research Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Potency Monitoring Project - Report 107, September 16, 2009 thru December 15, 2009, January 2010
- The use of marijuana can produce adverse physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral effects. It can impair short-term memory and judgment and distort perception. Because marijuana affects brain systems that are still maturing through young adulthood, its use by teens may have a negative effect on their development.
National Institute on Drug Abuse, Marijuana Abuse Research Report, September 2010
- Contrary to popular belief, marijuana can be addictive. Marijuana addiction is also linked to a withdrawal syndrome similar to that of nicotine withdrawal, which can make it hard to quit. People trying to quit report irritability, sleeping difficulties, craving, and anxiety. They also show increased aggression on psychological tests.
National Institute on Drug Abuse, Marijuana Abuse Research Report, September 2010

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- Another concern is marijuana's role as a "gateway drug," which makes subsequent use of more potent and disabling substances more likely. The Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found adolescents who smoke pot 85 times more likely to use cocaine than their non-pot smoking peers. And 60 percent of youngsters who use marijuana before they turn 15 later go on to use cocaine.
- But many teens encounter serious trouble well short of the "gateway." Marijuana is, by itself, a high-risk substance for adolescents. More than adults, they are likely to be victims of automobile accidents caused by marijuana's impact on judgment and perception. Casual sex, prompted by compromised judgment or marijuana's disinhibiting effects, leaves them vulnerable not only to unwanted pregnancy but also to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
American Council for Drug Education
- Smoking marijuana is far more dangerous than smoking cigarettes, according to a group of scientists in New Zealand. The researchers found that smoking one joint is equivalent to 20 cigarettes in terms of lung cancer. "Cannabis smokers end up with five times more carbon monoxide in their bloodstream (than tobacco/nicotine smokers)," team leader Richard Beasley, at the Medical Research Institute of New Zealand, said in a news release. The scientists also noted that marijuana could be expected to harm the airways more than tobacco/nicotine since its smoke contained twice the level of carcinogens, such as polyaromatic hydrocarbons, compared with tobacco cigarettes.
European Respiratory Journal, 2008, 32:815-816
- Although U.S. law classifies marijuana as a Schedule I controlled substance (which means it has no acceptable medical use), a number of patients claim that smoking pot has helped them deal with pain or relieved the symptoms of glaucoma, the loss of appetite that accompanies AIDS, or nausea caused by cancer chemotherapy. There is, however, no solid evidence that smoking marijuana creates any greater benefits than approved medications (including oral THC) now used to treat these patients, relieve their suffering, or mitigate the side effects of their treatment. Anecdotal assertions of beneficial effects have yet to be confirmed by controlled scientific research.
American Council for Drug Education
- Short-term effects of marijuana include problems with memory and learning, distorted perception (sights, sounds, time, touch), trouble with thinking and problem solving, loss of motor coordination, increased heart rate, and anxiety. These effects are even greater when other drugs are mixed with weed. A user may also experience dry mouth and throat.
- Marijuana smoke contains some of the same cancer-causing compounds as tobacco, sometimes in higher concentrations. Studies show that someone who smokes five joints per week may be taking in as many cancer-causing chemicals as someone who smokes a full pack of cigarettes every day.
Partnership for a Drug Free America, <http://www.drugfree.org/drug-guide/marijuana>
- People give many reasons for smoking marijuana. Some say it helps with mental, emotional and physical exhaustion (sometimes called "burnout").