

# No uptick in marijuana use by adolescents after states pass medical marijuana laws

19 October 2016



A dried flower bud of the Cannabis plant. Credit: Public Domain

Adults over the age of 25 increased their use of marijuana after their home states made changes to medical marijuana laws, according to new research by scientists at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. However, there was no difference in the prevalence of marijuana use reported for 12 to 17 or 18 to 25 year-olds after the laws passed. The findings are published online in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

The study is the first to link state medical [marijuana](#) laws with marijuana availability and use among adults. Results were based on 10 years of annual survey data from respondents to the National Survey of Drug Use and Health.

Until now there had been little information on how perceived availability is associated with marijuana use among the general population and, in particular, for adults, who are the majority of licensed medical marijuana users. Because medical marijuana laws are largely intended for older patients who suffer from illnesses such as

chronic pain or cancer, it was considered likely that medical marijuana laws affect different age groups differently, and through different modes of access.

"While the evidence had suggested there is a link between the passage of laws and increases in marijuana use by those 21 and older, it was not clear if all sub-groups of adults were influenced in the same way," said Silvia Martins, MD, PhD, associate professor of Epidemiology. "Before medical marijuana laws changed there was a concern that this type of legislation could potentially increase recreational marijuana use in adolescents and adult populations. At least for now, we do not see an increase in use among adolescents."

The study found that adults 26 years and older increased their past-month use of marijuana from 5.87 percent to 7.15 percent after medical marijuana laws had passed in their state.

In addition to increasing marijuana use among those 26 years of age and older, the perceived availability of marijuana also increased after the laws were passed. And for all age groups, the perception that marijuana became easily available was higher in states that had passed medical marijuana laws by 2013. However, similar to marijuana use, there was no effect of medical marijuana laws on a change in perception of availability of marijuana among adolescents (ages 12 to 17) or young adults (ages 18 to 25) but there was a significant increase in perceiving marijuana as easily available among those 26 and older, from 59 percent to 62 percent.

According to Dr. Martins, while not all states with medical marijuana laws have enforced patient registration, the number of patients registered in medical marijuana programs have increased over time in those states, particularly after 2009 when there were substantial changes in federal prosecution laws regarding marijuana cultivation, distribution, and possession.

"Understanding how the passage of medical marijuana laws affects different age groups improves our understanding of the effects of marijuana policies and provides information about the types of [public health](#) responses that should accompany major policy changes related to marijuana," said Martins.

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

APA citation: No uptick in marijuana use by adolescents after states pass medical marijuana laws (2016, October 19) retrieved 11 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-10-uptick-marijuana-adolescents-states-medical.html>

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