

**INFORMATION FROM THE BALTIMORE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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MARIJUANA: FACTS PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

The marijuana controversy in recent years has created a decreased perception of the harm caused by marijuana, especially among teens. The annual Monitoring the Future survey shows that teen use of marijuana is directly related to how safe teens perceive the drug to be. Since research has shown that brain development continues into the mid-20s, there is legitimate concern that the adolescent brain may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of marijuana than the adult brain. As adults, it's important to be informed about marijuana and its consequences.

- ⇒ Marijuana is a gateway drug that can lead to other drug use and addiction.
- ⇒ The marijuana of today is much more potent and addictive than in past years. Marijuana's potency is at the highest level in more than 30 years. According to research, 17% of marijuana users who begin smoking marijuana in their teens will become addicted. This percentage increases to 25% to 50% among daily users.
- ⇒ Like tobacco smoke, marijuana contains toxic substances that can damage the lungs, heart and reproductive system.
- ⇒ Studies show that marijuana affects memory, learning and the ability to focus.
- ⇒ Regular marijuana use has been linked to mental health problems in young people, such as anxiety and depression.
- ⇒ Marijuana affects reaction time, concentration, judgment, and coordination, just as alcohol does. The risk increases when marijuana is used in combination with alcohol and other illegal substances which is a common occurrence among teens.

The 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicated that 16.5% of Baltimore County 8th grade students and 51.3% of 12th grade students admit to smoking weed, a slang term for marijuana. These are both higher than the State averages. It is important to recognize that changes in behavior may be signs that warrant further investigation. Withdrawal, depression, fatigue, careless grooming, hostility, and deteriorating relationships with friends and family may be signs of drug use. Other signs may include changes in academic performance, increased absenteeism or truancy, loss of interest in favorite activities, and changes in eating or sleeping habits. It's important to rule out other causes before jumping to conclusions about drug use.

An individual actively using marijuana may exhibit the following signs:

- Dizziness, difficulty walking
- Laughing/giggling for no apparent reason
- Red, bloodshot eyes
- Inability to recall recent experiences
- Onset of sleepiness as the early effects of the drug fade

Talk honestly, openly and often with your teen. Know the facts so you can dispel the myths. Establish firm rules of no marijuana or other drug use with clear and consistent consequences.