

## MHS Bear Facts Article – March 2014

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### Marijuana Harmless? Think Again!

The increased use and acceptance of (so called) medical marijuana in many states, and the legalization of marijuana for recreational use in two nearby states has many people, parents and youth included, believing that there is little risk associated with marijuana use. In fact, in our 2013 Substance Use and School Climate Survey, 60% of MHS seniors reported that they thought there was no risk or only a slight risk associated with smoking marijuana one or two times each week. This attitude is completely contradictory to the growing body of scientific knowledge regarding the public health implications of marijuana use and addiction. The following is a brief summary of some of the recent research findings regarding marijuana. I encourage you to read and discuss these with your children and their friends.

- Marijuana is addictive, and the earlier a person first uses marijuana, the higher the risk of addiction. Research has found that 1 in 11 of **all** marijuana users become addicted to the drug. And for those who begin using prior to the age of 18 that number rises to **1 in 6**. Marijuana dependence is the number 1 reason adolescents are admitted to substance abuse treatment in the U.S.
- Marijuana directly affects the parts of the brain responsible for learning, memory, language, attention and reaction time, and some of the effects can last up to 28 days after abstinence from use. Developing adolescent brains are especially susceptible to the negative effects of marijuana, alcohol and other drug use. Teens that use marijuana are 4 times as likely to report “D” grades, and are twice as likely to drop out of school compared to non-users.
- Regular marijuana use can reduce IQ by as much as 8 points by age 38 among those who started using it prior to the age of 18, and is also linked with higher rates of unemployment, social welfare dependence and a lower self-reported quality of life than that of non-marijuana users.
- Marijuana use can exacerbate depression and has been associated with other serious mental health conditions such as schizophrenia and anxiety. Weekly marijuana use doubles an adolescent’s risk of depression and anxiety.
- Marijuana is the most prevalent illegal (in most states) drug detected in impaired drivers, fatally injured drivers and motor vehicle crash victims. Marijuana use negatively affects driver’s attentiveness, perception of time and speed, and ability to draw on information obtained from past experiences. An article in a 2012 edition of the British medical Journal concluded that marijuana use doubles the risk of car crashes.

- It is clear that for some people, the use of marijuana helps with chemotherapy induced nausea, appetite enhancement and pain relief. However, medicines are rarely, if ever smoked. A review conducted in 1999 by the U.S. Institute of Medicine concluded that smoked marijuana should “generally not be recommended for medical use”. This is because when smoking, marijuana’s effective dose varies due to metabolic differences in individuals as well as puff frequency, depth of inhalation and retention of inhaled smoke, and the potency of the product being smoked (in addition to the harmful effects of the smoke itself). Studies have also shown that many marijuana dispensaries in states where the medical use of marijuana is legal, do not follow appropriate standards of medical care and that many of their customers are using marijuana they purchase recreationally, not medically.
- Finally, the use of “medical” marijuana has affected youth drug use patterns. In those states with legal medical marijuana, abuse and dependence rates among youth are nearly twice as high as those in states without.

If some of this sounds familiar (increasing pressure for legalization and social acceptance of a product that is known to be harmful), think “Big Tobacco”. There is huge money behind the scenes in the drive to legalize marijuana medically and recreationally. But what we stand to gain in tax revenue pales in comparison to the enormous social costs we can expect if legalization spreads further...once again, think “Big Tobacco”.

The information above was taken from the websites listed below, and the citations for the studies referred to in this article are included on these sites.

SAM (Smart Approaches to Marijuana) – [www.learnaboutsam.com](http://www.learnaboutsam.com)

CADCA (Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America) – [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)

NIDA (national Institute on Drug Abuse) – [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)