



## Marijuana Legalization

### OVERVIEW

Marijuana is very harmful to adolescent health and development. Short- and long-term recreational use of marijuana in adolescents can cause mental health problems, decrease lung function, lead to substance abuse disorders, increase use of other illicit drugs, and decrease the likelihood of completing high school or obtaining a college degree.

In 2012, Colorado and Washington voted by ballot initiative to legalize the sale by and possession of marijuana for recreational use. Though marijuana is illegal under federal law, the US Department of Justice announced in 2013 that the agency would not challenge state recreational marijuana as long as the states enforce strict rules about the sale and distribution of the drug. Since that time, Alaska, California, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, DC have followed suit and enacted ballot initiatives legalizing marijuana.

### AAP POSITION

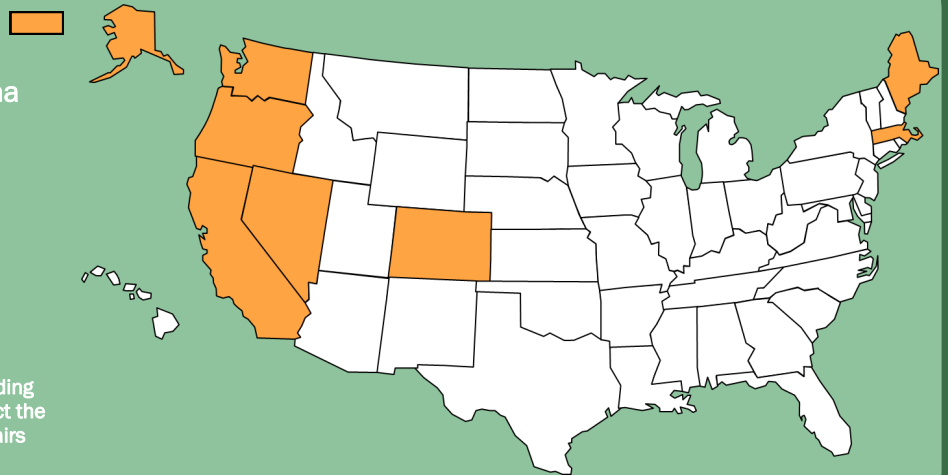
- Given the data supporting the negative health and brain development effects of marijuana in children and adolescents, ages 0 through 21 years, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is opposed to marijuana use in this population.
- The AAP opposes legalization of marijuana because of the potential harms to children and adolescents. The AAP supports studying the effects of recent laws legalizing the use of marijuana to better understand the impact and define best policies to reduce adolescent marijuana use.
- In states where marijuana legalization is currently legal, pediatricians should advocate that states regulate the product as closely as possible to tobacco and alcohol, with a minimum age of 21 years for purchase. These regulations should include strict penalties for those who sell marijuana products to those younger than 21 years, education and diversion programs for those younger than 21 years who possess marijuana, point-of-sale restrictions and other marketing restrictions. Marijuana should be sold in childproof packaging.

## FACTS

- Even with age restrictions, any policy that leads to increased adult use of marijuana is likely to lead to increased adolescent use, despite attempts to restrict sales to underage youth.
- Research shows that the younger an adolescent begins using marijuana, the more likely that a drug addiction or dependence will develop in adulthood.
- Marijuana alters mood control, coordination, judgment, which may contribute to unintentional deaths and injuries.
- Marijuana is linked to psychological problems, poor lung health, and a likelihood of drug dependence in adulthood.
- Legalization creates a lucrative and dangerous opportunity for industry to commercialize and market marijuana to children.

## PROGRESS

- 8 states and DC— laws allowing the sale of recreational marijuana



For information on current law or pending legislation in your state, please contact the AAP Division of State Government Affairs at [stgov@aap.org](mailto:stgov@aap.org)

## MORE

- [AAP Policy—The Impact of Marijuana Policies on Youth: Clinical, Research, and Legal Update](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2014-4146)—<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2014-4146>
- [AAP Technical Report—The Impact of Marijuana Policies on Youth: Clinical, Research, and Legal Update](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2014-4147)—<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2014-4147>
- [State Marijuana Laws](http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/state-advocacy/Documents/State%20Marijuana%20Laws.pdf)—[www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/state-advocacy/Documents/State%20Marijuana%20Laws.pdf](http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/state-advocacy/Documents/State%20Marijuana%20Laws.pdf)
- [Smart Approaches to Marijuana \(SAM\)](http://learnaboutsam.org/)—<http://learnaboutsam.org/>
- [American Lung Association: Marijuana and Lung Effects](http://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/smoking-facts/marijuana-and-lung-health.html)—<http://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/smoking-facts/marijuana-and-lung-health.html>
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](http://www.drugabuse.gov)—[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)