



We Must Do More to Protect Kids When It Comes to Today's Marijuana



The Problem:

A patchwork of state and local laws and regulations have failed to keep up with the evolution of products and potencies being sold, marketed, and labeled as “marijuana” or “cannabis” today.

Colorado was one of the first states in the country to legalize marijuana. When medical marijuana was first legalized, the average THC potency of the plant was less than 5%. Today’s THC potency levels have reached unprecedented levels and today’s products now come in new and radically different forms that can be particularly deceptive and harmful for kids.

As Congress considers far-reaching marijuana legislation including comprehensive banking privileges and access to Wall Street capital markets-- much can be learned from Colorado’s ten year experience and **why it’s imperative there are baseline safeguards for kids.**

Who We Are:

- Concerned parents, who came together after protecting kids ranked as the last priority in state policy-making proceedings, following the legalization of marijuana for recreational adult use. Since then, Once Chance to Grow Up has educated elected officials, media, parents, educators, and the public about the products and potencies while securing important youth safeguards. The organization has impacted over 37 pieces of marijuana legislation improving outcomes for youth while educating and engaging many thousands of parents, health experts, educators, and community stakeholders.
- These safeguards include product testing and labeling including THC and CBD potency, warnings, packaging, data collection, edible markings and serving size limits, pregnancy warnings, education funding, potency study, delivery and on-site club restrictions, reducing home grows, advertising limits, and important local restrictions.

What We’ve Learned:

- There’s a big difference between yesterday’s low THC products and today’s ultra-high THC products and strains. Yet, misinformation persists, increasing risks and harms, particularly for kids and young adults whose brains are still developing.
- There is a big difference between decriminalization, legalization, and commercialization (allowing commercial production and sales, without adequate safeguards).
- The past war on drugs unfairly targeted communities of color and the nation’s drug policies should address that. However, marijuana commercialization disproportionately hurts neighborhoods of color and the young people growing up there, creating new inequities.
- The words “marijuana” and/or “cannabis” don’t adequately describe today’s new high THC products, which include kid-friendly easily concealable forms like dissolvable powders, vapes, inhalers, suppositories or marijuana concentrates that can reach THC potencies of 98%.

The health of America’s kids is at severe risk and must be addressed:

Rising THC potencies, increased availability, and normalization of use are an increasing threat to growing brains, which are developing into the mid-20s. The impacts to youth in the early legalization states are just being documented and should be taken as a huge warning for the rest of the nation.

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OneChancetoGrowUp

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One Chance to Grow Up protects kids from THC through transparency, education, empowerment, and policy. We don’t take sides on the politics of legalization but instead serve as a reliable resource for parents, media, policymakers, and all who care about kids. Started by concerned parents, we’re a 501(c)(3) nonprofit supported by charitable contributions.



1. **High THC products dramatically increase the risk of young people having severe negative mental health outcomes.** Several recent credible studies conclude that high THC marijuana can lead to: psychotic symptoms and/or psychotic disorders including schizophrenia, mental health symptoms and/or problems including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, cannabis hyperemesis syndrome (uncontrolled and repetitive vomiting), and cannabis use disorder/dependence, including physical and psychological dependence (2019 “THC Concentration Report” and included studies, “Use of Regulated Marijuana Concentrate” 2021 Marijuana Enforcement Education Resource, 2019 JAMA Psychiatry).
 - A report by the Senate on International Narcotics Control in March 2021 summarized that daily use of cannabis containing 10 percent or more of THC, increases chance of developing psychosis almost five times compared to non-users...while researchers suggested that if cannabis potency was capped, the incidence of psychosis and other negative mental health disorders could be reduced (p. 22).
2. **THC is now the #1 substance in youth completed suicide.** In the state with longest experience with THC commercialization, THC is the #1 substance found in toxicology reports done on youth completed suicides for ages 10–24. Youth suicide rates have increased dramatically and remain among the highest in country (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment).
3. **New ultra potent products are appealing to kids and marketed to them.** THC-infused (and kid-friendly) drinks, candies, and other appealingly sweet foods are still permitted to deceptively mimic everyday products, even when there’s been a 1375% increase in accidental child ingestions. 1 in 3 national marijuana unintended exposures is in kids. Symptoms reported include: agitation, slow heartbeat, fever, coma, nausea/vomiting, stupor, tremor and seizures (US National Poison Control Data, JAMA)
 - THC vaping increased in all grades nationally with a reported doubling of THC vaping among high school seniors. This was the largest youth use increase ever reported for a substance other than nicotine vaping (2019 Monitoring the Future National Youth Survey) MJ use in the past 12 months and past 30 days for young adults reached the highest levels ever recorded since 1988 (2021 Monitoring the Future National Survey).
 - The National Institute of Drug Abuse reports 22% of adolescents (<18 years old) and 19% of young adults (18–24 years old) report marijuana use at the same time today’s marijuana has become a harder stronger drug. Even the Netherlands, treats anything over 15% THC potency, as a harder stronger drug.
 - The US Surgeon General recently issued a rare Public Health Advisory Warning and Call to Action on Youth Mental Health Crisis (12/8/2021) “Symptoms of anxiety, depression and suicide attempts are up over 50%”.
4. **New high potency products are putting already marginalized communities at further risk.** Negative impacts of THC commercialization are often concentrated in neighborhoods already facing multiple challenges including higher poverty and crime, causing new inequities. (2019 City of Denver Child Health & Well-being Index & map of dispensaries and commercial grows, and manufacturing facilities)
 - Emerging research shows #1 contributor to future opioid use disorder is marijuana use before the age of 18 (Drug and Alcohol Dependence 2020).
 - From 2008–2016 self-reported pregnancy use increased 4–7% according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse. A major study found that 69% of the 400 marijuana dispensaries contacted were recommending marijuana for pregnant women. This is when THC for babies has been linked to: reduced fetal growth, greater risk of stillbirth, preterm birth, low birth weight, and long-term brain development issues affecting memory and cognition (SAMHSA).

Urgent Policy Measures:

- **Amend the SAFER Banking Act to add national youth safeguards.** This is the least the industry should agree to in order to access the nation’s banks and capital markets which will lead to further industry growth.
- **Advance youth safeguards in National THC Transparency legislation:**
 - Prohibit kid-friendly products including flavors
 - Require child-resistant packaging and THC warning sign
 - Limit serving size (potency & weight) and amount per package
 - Require health & safety disclosures on packaging and advertising
 - Strictly limit advertising and marketing reaching kids, including outdoor advertising
 - Monitor and report false claims
 - Collect data on youth impacts
 - Fund robust education to prevent and reduce youth use and to inform pregnant women
- **Treat “medical marijuana” more like a medicine.** At a minimum, require prescribing recommendations to specify THC potency and amounts, product type, intake method, and timeframe while addressing false claims.
- **Address urgent need for clarifying language around hemp in the U.S. Farm Bill.** Inform national marijuana rescheduling evaluation process by providing details on the actual products and potencies being sold, marketed, and labeled as “marijuana” and “cannabis” today.
- **Ensure policies are guided by the current science while allowing for more research.**

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