



Promoting Health and Wellness in our Community

October, 2022

A controversial topic we read about in the news today is the impact of the legalization of recreational marijuana across Rhode Island as well as individual cities and towns. Thirty-one cities and towns in the State, including Middletown, will vote on a referendum to decide which marijuana activities voters want to be allowed within the town's borders (cultivation, manufacture, laboratory testing, or retail sale of adult recreational use.) While some may focus on the benefits to the tax revenue, it's critical to learn the facts and consider the "unintended consequences" when it comes to the health and safety of our kids.

What are these "unintended consequences? A few of the major concerns of the Middletown Prevention Coalition are centered around increased access to marijuana for youth, a reduction in the "perception of harm" as reported in recent student surveys and the most concerning, the increased potency of today's marijuana and the many forms of consumption available such as vaping and edibles.

Even though marijuana is still illegal for people under age 21, evidence is emerging that the decriminalization of marijuana is increasing the number of kids who consume it illegally. More retail outlets lend to higher youth consumption rates due to increased access and availability.

For many of our kids, legalization will reinforce their belief that marijuana is acceptable, safe, and harmless. Add to that the impact of social media, where youth spend a great deal of their time. If a teen searches for information on how to get access to marijuana products or creative ways to get high, it's all there at their fingertips. A study published in the journal "Drug and Alcohol Dependence" found that adolescents who liked or followed marijuana marketing on social media were five times more likely to have used marijuana over the past year compared to those who did not.

The legalization of recreational marijuana shows how America's attitude toward the drug may be changing but the drug has changed too. In the recent years, advancements in growing and cultivation and delivery methods have produced strains of marijuana that contain a much higher THC level than what people were smoking in the past. This "more potent pot" can lead to a greater chance for youth addiction and health issues regarding marijuana toxicity.

Prevention coalitions are not alone on this matter either. Law enforcement has also expressed their concern for the potential negative impact on public safety. The RI Police Chiefs Association adamantly opposed legalization. They feel it "does not adequately address critical public safety concerns and the resources needed to deal with legalization."

The Coalition realizes there are many ways to look at the recent legalization of marijuana in Rhode Island, but our focus is on the potential adverse impact on our youth. We hope you will take the time to learn the facts, especially how legalization has affected youth data in States like Colorado and Washington where recreational adult use has been in place for a while. For us, it's all about the kids!

To learn more about the impact of marijuana legalization at <https://learnaboutsam.org>

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