

Marijuana Policy Project (MPP) Misleading --- Youth Marijuana Use in Medical Marijuana States Is High

In the paper, "Marijuana Use by Young People," the Marijuana Policy Project (MPP) sets out to demonstrate that state medical marijuana laws do not lead to increased use of marijuana by youth. The authors make this argument by taking youth marijuana use rates at the time the law was passed in each state and then compare it to recent rates. This is how MPP is able to find a strong trend of decreasing use, in some cases an even greater decrease than nationally.

The flaw in the case made by MPP is that in the years leading up to the passage of a state medical marijuana law, youth marijuana rates climb because of the publicity generated by the movement to pass such a law. This public promotion of marijuana laws, as happens for a few years in each state prior to passage, has a strong effect of increasing youth use. So, the highest rates in each medical marijuana state should occur sometime between the beginning of MPP's (and other pro-marijuana groups') advocacy and the passage of the law. Once the peak is reached, it will take some years for the rate in each state to stabilize, but even when stabilized it will tend to stay above the national rate.

The most accessible data to demonstrate this is seen in statistics from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) showing state-by-state estimates of marijuana use in the years 2002, 2003/2004, and 2005/2006 (*Figures prior to 2002 were based on a different NSDUH survey format*). Although information on when marijuana law "reform" efforts were most heavily promoted may not be easily accessible, there are some observable patterns. The two states that most recently passed medical marijuana laws, New Mexico (2007) and Rhode Island (2006) both had their peak of past month marijuana use by 12-17 year-olds in the 2003/2004 data. Rhode Island's 10.97% and New Mexico's 11.91% were respectively 42% and 54% higher than the 7.73% national average that year. The next two states most recently passing medical marijuana laws were Vermont and Montana in 2004. The peak in those states' rates (among the three time periods examined) was in 2002. Montana's percent of 12-17 year-old past month use of marijuana was 11.64%, and Vermont's was a very high 13.31%. These were respectively 42% and 63% higher than the 8.17% national average that year.

The correct interpretation of the figures given by the Marijuana Policy Project is not that medical marijuana laws have no effect on youth use but rather that the advocacy of those laws has a dramatic effect of increasing youth use and that youth use rates tend to remain above national averages following passage.

In 2005/2006 all twelve medical marijuana states remained above the national average of 6.02% youth past-month marijuana use, with the three highest rates in the country being Maine with 10.99%, Montana with 10.56%, and Vermont with 10.08%.

Youth Marijuana Use in “Medical” Marijuana States Is Above the National Average

National Survey of Drug Use and Health, NSDUH, Percent 12-17
Year Old Use of Marijuana in Past 30 Days

State	Year “medical” marijuana law passed	2002	2003/2004	2005/2006
USA/National Use		8.17	7.73	6.02
California	1996	7.60	8.52	6.51
Washington	1998	8.93	7.98	7.70
Oregon	1998	8.72	9.74	8.36
Alaska	1998	9.44	12.02	8.26
Maine	1999	9.60	11.69	10.99**
Nevada	2000	11.24	7.82	7.57
Hawaii	2000	9.30	9.71	7.04
Colorado	2000	9.87	9.83	7.44
Vermont	2004	13.31*	11.11	10.08**
Montana	2004	11.64*	10.00	10.56**
Rhode Island	2006	10.72	10.97*	9.74
New Mexico	2007	7.55	11.91*	7.79

Bold – Marijuana use above national average

* – Peak marijuana use before passage of “medical” marijuana laws

** – Highest marijuana use in the country