

TEEN USE OF MARIJUANA IN COLORADO

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Colorado Teen Marijuana Statistics

The Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS), a state-wide health survey supported by Colorado state agencies, collects information from Colorado middle and high school students every odd calendar year. According to a recent release from Colorado’s public health agency, HKCS 2015 results show that “(youth) marijuana use has not increased since legalization.”¹ Lifetime and past-month marijuana use among Colorado youth did not change significantly from 2009 through 2015,² which is noteworthy given that marijuana became legal and commercially available for adults 21 years and older in Colorado during this time period.³ Past-month and lifetime marijuana use among Colorado high school students was similar to, and in fact slightly lower than the national average in 2015 (Figure 1),⁴ which suggests that **the presence of a robust, state-regulated cannabis industry does not encourage or enable further teen use.**

Figure 1: Lifetime and Past Month Marijuana Use Among High School Students: Colorado vs. National Average (HKCS 2015)

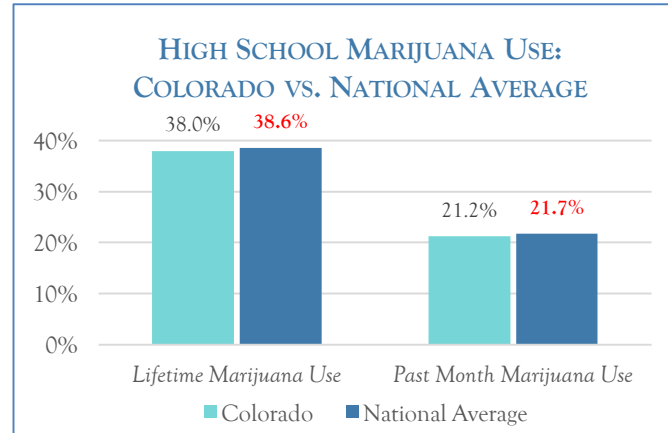
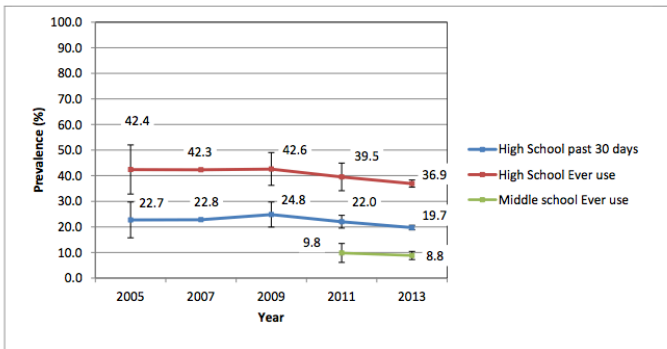


Figure 2. Marijuana Use among Students in Colorado 2005-2013



*Middle School current use only 2013. The 2007 estimates are unweighted and therefore no confidence intervals are available. Data source: YRBS data 2005 to 2009, HKCS data 2011, 2013

Declining Middle and High School Marijuana Use

The Healthy Kids Colorado Survey and CDC-sponsored Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance Survey indicate that middle school marijuana use as well as past-month and lifetime marijuana use by Colorado high school students has been on a downward trend since 2009. Past month marijuana use among students in Colorado dropped over 20% in four years from 24.8% in 2009 to 19.7% in 2013 (Figure 2).¹ **This drop in recent teenage marijuana use coincides with the rise of Colorado’s regulated medical marijuana market.**

Increased Adult Marijuana Use Has Not Affected Youth Use or Perceptions of Harm

Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) show that the percentage of Coloradoans 18 years of age and older who report past-month marijuana use increased from 10.40% in 2011/2012⁵ to 15.17% in 2013/2014.⁶ Substantial underreporting of illicit activity is common in survey research⁷ so this upturn could reflect greater willingness to honestly report marijuana use post-legalization or a real increase in use. Either way, NSDUH found no statistically significant change in past-month marijuana use or perceived harm associated with smoking marijuana monthly among youth aged 12-17 from 2010 to 2014⁸. **These findings suggest that increased adult marijuana consumption does not necessarily result in an increase in marijuana use among youth nor affect teen perceptions of harm associated with regular use.**

¹ Press Release: Youth marijuana use unchanged, alcohol, tobacco use down in Colorado. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, June 20, 2016. <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/news/HKCS2015>

² Marijuana Use Among Youth in Colorado Infographic, Healthy Kids Colorado Survey 2015, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PF_Youth_MJ-Infographic-Digital.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2011, 2012, and 2013,” SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality.

<http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUHStateEst2012-2013-p1/ChangeTabs/NSDUHsaeShortTermCHG2013.htm>

⁶ 2013-2014 NSDUH State-Specific Tables: Colorado <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/1/1/NSDUHsaeColorado2014.pdf>

⁷ Timothy P. Johnson, “Sources of Error in Substance Use Prevalence Surveys,” International Scholarly Research Notices, vol. 2014, Article ID 923290, 21 pages, 2014. doi:10.1155/2014/923290

⁸ “State Estimates of Adolescent Marijuana Use and Perceptions of Risk of Harm from Marijuana Use: 2013 and 2014”

http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_2121/ShortReport-2121.html