

**Remarks for VADM Jerome M. Adams  
Marijuana Advisory Press Conference  
Thursday, August 28 at 9:00 AM ET**

Thank you, Secretary Azar, for the work that you do every day to improve the health of the American public. As the Nation's Doctor, I am proud to stand with you to sound a national alarm about the harmful effects of marijuana use on the developing brain.

This Surgeon General's Advisory is in response to high rates of marijuana use among pregnant women and youth, widespread and growing access to increasingly potent marijuana through legalization at the state level, and a mounting body of evidence of harms that jeopardize our nation's future.

As Surgeon General, one of my primary roles is to communicate the science about health to the American people. In my travels around the country, I also get to listen. I have been to Sacramento, San Diego, Seattle, Colorado and Oklahoma. Over and over again, I hear great and rising concern about the normalization of marijuana use and the impact that a false perception of its safety is having on our young people and pregnant women.

***Marijuana is everywhere.*** More than half of States have legalized marijuana in some way, and along with this trend, we have seen a decline in the perception of its harmfulness among high school students.

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug among pregnant women. In adolescents, it is third behind alcohol and the recent rise in e-cigarettes, which is now in second place.

Let me surprise you with a few statistics:

- Between 2002 and 2017, marijuana use in the last month among pregnant women ***doubled***
- In 2017, more than 9 million youth reported marijuana use in the prior month and
- Finally, in that same year, new users between the ages of 12 and 25 rose by almost 30%.

Here is something ***else*** you may not know.

Today's marijuana is far more potent than that of the past. The concentration of THC, the component responsible for euphoria and addiction, has increased **three-fold** over the last few decades.

**Why is that important?** The science tells us that the higher the THC concentration, the higher the risk. These potency-related risks can lead to dependence and even, addiction, as well as mental health effects like anxiety and psychosis. The earlier and more often a person uses marijuana, the higher the risk. Nearly one in five people who begin marijuana use during adolescence become addicted.

I want to emphasize what Secretary Azar just said; frequent marijuana use during adolescence can impair a child's attention, memory and decision-making, jeopardizing their success now and later in life.

Youth who regularly use marijuana are more likely to show a decline in IQ and school performance and are more apt to miss classes and drop out. We have seen a rise in youth arrests and also in emergency department visits for psychosis, for overdose, and even accidental ingestions due to highly concentrated products.

Marijuana use during pregnancy can affect the baby's brain and also result in lower birth weight, a marker for early death and disability. Use during breast-feeding is not safe, since THC gets into breast milk. Marijuana and tobacco smoke share harmful components; **no one should smoke either around a baby.**

We must take action now to protect our young people during a particularly vulnerable time of life. Many resources are available in the Advisory to help parents, teachers, clinicians, and others help protect our youth against harm due to marijuana use.

Help me spread this message across America: *no amount of marijuana use during pregnancy or adolescence is known to be safe.*

**KNOW THE RISKS. TAKE ACTION. PROTECT YOUR FUTURE.**

As Secretary Azar said, many agencies across HHS, including SAMHSA, CDC, NIH, and my office, are providing guidance on the effects of and trends in marijuana use. We're working to get more data about the impact that marijuana use has across various populations, particularly in regard to long-term health effects.

Let me introduce leaders from across the Department who have expertise and are taking action to address this critical public health issue: Assistant Secretary for Health, ADM Brett Giroir, Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Dr. Elinore McKance-Katz, and Director of NIH's National Institute on Drug Abuse, Dr. Nora Volkow.

My colleagues and I will take your questions now.