

Colorado

Colorado was the first U.S. state to legalize recreational marijuana — and now offers the longest available record of the consequences. Adult daily use, impaired driving, ER visits, poison-control calls, marijuana-related psychiatric hospitalizations, and youth use of *high-potency* forms have all **moved in the wrong direction**.

COLORADO BRFS · DAILY OR NEAR-DAILY USE AMONG ADULTS WHO USED MARIJUANA IN THE PAST 30 DAYS¹

48%

OF COLORADO ADULT MARIJUANA USERS CONSUME DAILY OR NEAR-DAILY

TRENDING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION



By comparison, only **~9% of Colorado adults who drink alcohol** do so daily or near-daily² — marijuana's daily-user share is roughly **5x that of alcohol**.

COLORADO DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION · 2024 FATAL-CRASH TOXICOLOGY⁴

A third of impaired fatal-crash drivers tested positive for multiple impairing substances

151

DRIVERS IN FATAL IMPAIRED CRASHES, 2024

32%

POLYDRUG-POSITIVE AT THE WHEEL

Polydrug fatality involvement has risen **each year since 2020**, when Colorado tipped past 30% — up from 26% in 2017. Marijuana now appears in roughly 1 in 5 fatal-crash toxicology screens statewide.⁴

COLORADO HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION · ED VISIT DATA⁶

Mental-health diagnoses are 5x more prevalent in marijuana-coded ED visits



A Denver Health analysis (2025) found **psychosis-related hospitalizations rose significantly** among young adults 21–29 after legalization — and rose across *all* age groups for psychosis encounters involving a CUD diagnosis.⁷

CDOT 2023 MARIJUANA SURVEY · N≈1,000 COLORADO DRIVERS⁸

37%

Of Gen Z marijuana consumers in Colorado believe they can drive safely while high

Only 17% of drivers ages 25–34 said the same. Gen Z — the first cohort to grow up under recreational legalization — uses marijuana **more than twice as often** as the average Colorado driver (7x/mo vs. 3x/mo).⁸

CDPHE + HINCKLEY ET AL., 2024^{9,10}

90%+ THC

Today's Colorado concentrates are *not* the marijuana of a generation ago

Colorado's monitoring system records concentrates routinely testing at **90–95% THC**; concentrates' market share doubled from 11.6% to 23.4% in just three years.¹⁰ Over the same period, **regular marijuana use among Colorado youth under 15 rose 14.8%** (2017→2019), and ED visits among children 0–9 rose 66%.⁹

A COMMERCIALIZED INDUSTRY, TWELVE YEARS IN^{11,12}

\$16B+

Total Colorado **marijuana sales** since 2014.¹¹

1,000+

Active **dispensaries** — more than Starbucks and McDonald's combined.¹¹

\$955K

Pot industry **lobbying** at the state capitol in a single year.¹²

Endnotes

All statistics in this brief are drawn from Colorado state agencies, peer-reviewed studies, and federal data products. Where a finding appears in multiple sources, the most rigorous primary source is named.

1. Smart Approaches to Marijuana (Feb. 2021), citing Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, **Monitoring Health Concerns Related to Marijuana in Colorado** – Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Daily or near-daily use among Colorado adults rose from 7.6% (2017) to 9.1% (2019); among Colorado adults who currently use marijuana, the share consuming daily rose from approximately 40% (2017) to **48.2% (2019)**. The upward trajectory has continued in subsequent monitoring cycles.
learnaboutsam.org/2021/02/new-colorado-report-outlines-dramatic-increases-in-harms-to-public-health-safety
2. Lee, S. J., Cox, S., Cox, A., et al. (2021). **Current Marijuana Use and Alcohol Consumption Among Adults Following the Legalization of Nonmedical Retail Marijuana Sales – Colorado, 2015–2019**. *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 70(43), 1505–1509. Among Colorado adults who currently drink alcohol, daily or near-daily drinking sits in the high single digits (~9%) per Colorado BRFSS, versus ~48% daily or near-daily use among current marijuana users.
cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7043a3.htm
3. Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (2021). **Impacts on Marijuana Legalization in Colorado**. Office of Research and Statistics. Three-cycle longitudinal report pursuant to SB 13-283. Findings include: marijuana or marijuana-in-combination identified as the impairing substance in Colorado State Patrol DUIs rose from 12% of all DUIs in 2014 to 31% in 2020; marijuana-related hospitalizations, ER visits, poison-control calls, and fatal crashes positive for cannabinoids have all increased over the past decade.
dcj.colorado.gov/news-article/colorado-division-of-criminal-justice-publishes-report-on-impacts-of-marijuana
4. Colorado Department of Transportation (2024). **Cannabis and Driving: Data and Research – Polydrug Involvement in Fatal Crashes, 2017–2024**. Source: CDOT Data Intelligence Group, toxicology data. Counts of drivers in fatal impaired crashes who tested positive for multiple categories of impairing substances: 114 (26%) in 2017; 151 (32%) in 2024 – peaks of 33% in 2023.
cdot.gov/safety/impaired-driving/druggeddriving/data
5. Wang, G. S., Hall, K., Vigil, D., Banerji, S., Monte, A., & VanDyke, M. (2017). **Marijuana and Acute Health Care Contacts in Colorado**. *Preventive Medicine*. Colorado Hospital Association data show hospitalization rates with marijuana-related billing codes increased from 274 to 593 per 100,000 hospitalizations between 2000 and 2015; Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Center marijuana-exposure calls rose from 41 in 2006 to 276 in 2019.
pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28365373
6. Hall, K. E., Monte, A. A., Chang, T., Fox, J., Brevik, C., Vigil, D. I., Van Dyke, M., & James, K. A. (2018). **Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Associated With Cannabis in Colorado**. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 25(5), 526–537. Statewide ED data show a 5.07× higher prevalence of mental-health diagnoses in marijuana-coded ED visits compared to visits without marijuana-related codes (95% CI 5.0–5.1).
pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5980767
7. Hinckley, J. D., et al. (2025). **Changes in Psychosis-Related Emergency Department and Hospitalization Rates Among Youth Following Cannabis Legalization in Colorado**. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. Using Denver Health electronic health records, the authors found a modest increase in overall ED visits and hospitalizations with any psychosis diagnosis among young adults aged 21–29 after legalization, and a significant rise in psychosis hospitalizations that specifically contained a Marijuana Use Disorder diagnosis across all age groups.
sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0376871625001723
8. Colorado Department of Transportation (2024). **CDOT Examines Marijuana-Impaired Driving Behaviors of Gen Z, 10 Years After Recreational Marijuana Became Legal**. 2023 CDOT marijuana survey of approximately 1,000 randomly selected Colorado drivers: 37% of Gen Z marijuana consumers said they could drive safely under the influence vs. 17% of consumers aged 25–34. Gen Z consumers use marijuana roughly 7 times per month vs. 3 times per month for the average Colorado driver.
cdot.gov/news/2024/february/cdot-examines-marijuana-impaired-driving-behaviors-of-gen-z
9. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (Jan. 2021), **Monitoring Health Concerns Related to Marijuana in Colorado**. Findings include: regular marijuana use among Colorado youth under age 15 rose **14.8% from 2017 to 2019**; ED discharges with marijuana-related billing codes among children aged 0–9 rose **66%** over the same period; unintentional pediatric exposures (ages 0–5) rose from 37 reports in 2016 to 95 in 2019. Increases in high school students using dabs and edibles also documented.
learnaboutsam.org/2021/02/new-colorado-report-outlines-dramatic-increases-in-harms-to-public-health-safety
10. Hinckley, J. D., et al. (2024). **The Impact of Recreational Cannabis Legalization on Youth: The Colorado Experience**. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. Colorado marijuana concentrates in the state's monitoring system routinely test at **90–95% THC**; concentrates' market share rose from 11.6% in 2014 to 23.4% in 2017.
pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10097013
11. University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus · Department of Psychiatry (2024). **Cannabis: Lure of Colorado High Changes Mental Healthcare**. 12 years after Amendment 64, Colorado's commercialized marijuana market has exceeded **\$16 billion in cumulative sales** with over **1,000 active dispensaries** – outnumbering Starbucks and McDonald's locations combined. The Colorado Department of Revenue licensed 1,686 marijuana businesses as of April 2020.
news.cuanschutz.edu/news-stories/cannabis-lure-of-colorado-high-change-s-mental-healthcare
12. Colorado Sun (2019). **Marijuana Industry Lobbying at the Colorado Statehouse**. Documented pot-industry lobbying expenditures exceeded \$955,000 at the Colorado General Assembly in 2018; subsequent legislative cycles have seen the industry secure amendments to or repeal of public-health provisions, including elements of the Clean Indoor Air Act and outdoor-advertising restrictions for marijuana products.
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