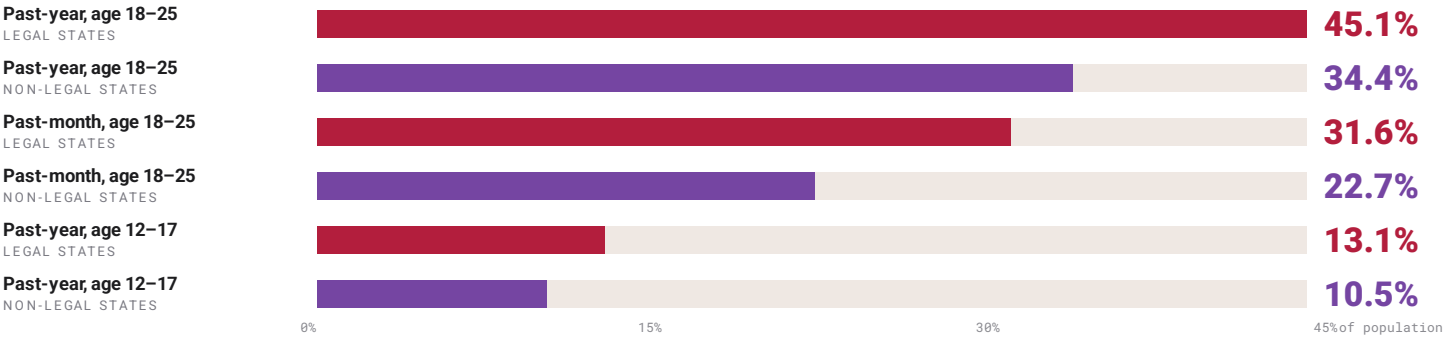
ADOLESCENT HEALTH · PUBLIC POLICY

Youth Marijuana Use

Teen prevalence has hit multi-decade lows, yet **legalization is slowing a decline already underway**, the kids who do use are using **more potent products, more often**, and new evidence links adolescent use to **psychotic, bipolar, depressive, and anxiety disorders** by age 26.

NSDUH 2021–22 ■ LEGAL ■ NON-LEGAL

In every age band and every window, youth marijuana use is higher in legal states than in non-legal states[1]



JAMA HEALTH FORUM · FEB 2026 · KAISER COHORT N=463,396[2]

Adolescent use predicts psychiatric disorders by young adulthood

463,396
ADOLESCENTS UNIVERSALLY SCREENED, AGES 13–17

4 disorders
PSYCHOTIC, BIPOLAR, DEPRESSIVE, ANXIETY: ALL UP

Past-year cannabis use in adolescence was associated with a **significantly increased risk** of every disorder studied by age 26, the largest cohort study of its kind.[2]

MONITORING THE FUTURE 2024 · DAILY-USE PREVALENCE[3]

Daily marijuana use now *exceeds* daily cigarette use in every grade



A complete generational inversion: high-school seniors are **7× more likely** to be daily marijuana users than daily cigarette users.[3]

MTF 2024 · FIRST YEAR DELTA-8 MEASURED IN 8TH & 10TH GRADERS[3]

12.3%

Of 12th graders used Delta-8 THC in the past year, an *unregulated* hemp-derived intoxicant

Delta-8 reached **7.9% of 10th graders** and **2.9% of 8th graders** in 2024, the first year it was measured in lower grades. Sold legally at gas stations and online, it bypasses every state-level age safeguard built into adult-use legalization.[3]

JAMA PSYCHIATRY · CERDÁ ET AL.[4]

+25%

Cannabis Use Disorder rose in young people following state-level legalization

Among adolescents who first used cannabis at age 14 or younger, **10.7%** develop a substance-use disorder, **nearly 2× the rate** seen in adolescent users of nicotine, alcohol, or prescription drugs.[5]

THE RISK PICTURE FOR YOUNG USERS KEEPS GETTING WORSE[6,7,8]

36%
Of 12th graders now view regular use as risky, **down from 58%** in 2000.[6]

5×
More likely to use marijuana if exposed to **cannabis marketing** on social media.[7]

6.9×
Higher odds of past-year use among Washington teens after the 2012 legalization vote, once the ongoing decline is controlled. **Legalization slowed a decline already underway.**[8]

SOURCES · YOUTH MARIJUANA USE

Endnotes

All statistics in this brief are drawn from peer-reviewed studies and federally funded national surveys. Where a finding appears in multiple sources, the most rigorous primary source is named.

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2024). **Results from the 2021–2022 NSDUH State Estimates of Substance Use and Mental Disorders.** Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. State-by-state averages computed across recreational-legal jurisdictions (CO, WA, OR, AK, NV, CA, MA, IL, ME, MI, VT) vs. non-legal states for past-month and past-year use, ages 12–17 and 18–25.
samhsa.gov/data/report/2021-2022-nsduh-state-prevalence-estimates

2. Young-Wolff, K. C., Cortez, C. A., Alexeeff, S. E., Silver, L. D., Pacula, R. L., Slama, N. E., Padon, A. A., Satre, D. D., Campbell, C. I., Koshy, M. T, Does, M. B., & Sterling, S. A. (2026). **Adolescent Cannabis Use and Risk of Psychotic, Bipolar, Depressive, and Anxiety Disorders.** *JAMA Health Forum*, published online Feb. 20, 2026. doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2025.6839. Kaiser Permanente Northern California cohort of 463,396 adolescents aged 13–17 universally screened for cannabis use; past-year cannabis use was associated with significantly elevated incidence of psychotic, bipolar, depressive, and anxiety disorders by age 26.
jamanetwork.com/journals/jama-health-forum/fullarticle/2833900

3. Miech, R. A., Johnston, L. D., Patrick, M. E., & O'Malley, P. M. (2025). **Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975–2024: Overview and Detailed Results for Secondary School Students.** Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. Daily-use prevalence (past 30 days): 12th grade MJ 5.6% vs. cigarettes 0.8%; 10th grade MJ 3.1% vs. cigarettes 0.3%; 8th grade MJ 0.9% vs. cigarettes 0.2%. Delta-8 THC past-12-month use first measured among 8th and 10th graders in 2024: 2.9% / 7.9% / 12.3%.
monitoringthefuture.org/results/annual-reports

4. Cerdá, M., Mauro, C., Hamilton, A., Levy, N. S., Santaella-Tenorio, J., Hasin, D., Wall, M. M., Keyes, K. M., & Martins, S. S. (2020). **Association Between Recreational Marijuana Legalization in the United States and Changes in Marijuana Use and Cannabis Use Disorder from 2008 to 2016.** *JAMA Psychiatry*, 77(2), 165. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.3254. Found a ~25% increase in CUD prevalence among young people following state legalization for recreational use.
jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2755276

5. Volkow, N. D., Han, B., Einstein, E. B., & Compton, W. M. (2021). **Prevalence of Substance Use Disorders by Time Since First Substance Use Among Young People in the US.** *JAMA Pediatrics*, published online March 29, 2021. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.6981. SUD prevalence in 12–17-year-old marijuana users is roughly double the rate seen among adolescent users of nicotine, alcohol, or prescription drugs.
jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2777817

6. Drug Abuse Statistics / Monitoring the Future (2024). **Perceived Harmfulness of Marijuana Use Among 12th Graders, 2000–2024.** The share of high-school seniors who view regular marijuana use as dangerous fell from 58% (2000) to 36% (2024); 8th graders remain 111.8% more likely than 12th graders to perceive occasional use as risky.
drugabusestatistics.org/marijuana-addiction

7. Trangenstein, P. J., Whitehill, J. M., Jenkins, M. C., Jernigan, D. H., & Moreno, M. A. (2019). **Active Cannabis Marketing and Adolescent Past-Year Cannabis Use.** *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 204, 107548. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.107548. Adolescents exposed to active cannabis marketing on social-media platforms were approximately 5× more likely to report past-year cannabis use.
doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.107548

8. Bailey, J. A., Epstein, M., Roscoe, J. N., Oesterle, S., Kosterman, R., & Hill, K. G. (2020). **Marijuana Legalization and Youth Marijuana, Alcohol, and Cigarette Use and Norms.** *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 59(3), 309–316. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2020.04.008. Seattle Social Development Project longitudinal sample (ages 10–20, Washington state) followed before and after the 2012 nonmedical legalization vote. Controlling for birth cohort, sex, race, and parent education, legalization predicted higher odds of past-year marijuana use (AOR 6.85) and alcohol use (AOR 3.38), with no significant effect on cigarette use. Teen cigarette and alcohol use have declined for two decades; the authors conclude that "a teen usage rate that holds steady isn't good enough if it would normally be going down."
doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2020.04.008

9. Orr, C., Spechler, P., Cao, Z., Albaugh, M., Chaarani, B., Mackey, S., D'Souza, D., … Garavan, H. (2019). **Grey Matter Volume Differences Associated with Extremely Low Levels of Cannabis Use in Adolescence.** *Journal of Neuroscience*, 39(10), 1817–1827. doi:10.1523/JNEUROSCI.3375-17.2018. Use produces detectable changes in adolescent gray-matter volume, suggesting marijuana exposure may affect brain development even at low exposure levels.
doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.3375-17.2018

10. Power, E., Sabherwal, S., Healy, C., O'Neill, A., Cotter, D., & Cannon, M. (2021). **Intelligence Quotient Decline Following Frequent or Dependent Cannabis Use in Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies.** *Psychological Medicine*, 51(2), 194–200. doi:10.1017/S0033291720005036. Frequent or dependent cannabis use in youth is associated with measurable IQ decline; chronic adolescent use is further associated with reduced educational performance and outcomes.
doi.org/10.1017/S0033291720005036