

National Coalition Institute's **Research into Action**
Early Intervention Can Reduce Marijuana Use Initiation Among Youth

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Parents have the greatest affect on a young person's decision to use marijuana during early adolescence. After age 15, youth tend to base the decision more on peer influence. This research, published in *Substance Use & Misuse* indicates that parents must reach young people before age 13 to increase the likelihood that the youth will choose against initiating marijuana use.

This research could play a role in structuring community programs and initiatives aimed at preventing youth from initiating marijuana use. This is the first study to document population incidence rates of marijuana initiation throughout the course of adolescence. It demonstrates that risk and protective factors typically associated with marijuana initiation can change as an adolescent progresses through this critical stage of development.

How did they do it?

The study, using a unique design, analyzed nationally representative and longitudinal survey data gathered between 1999 and 2004 under a National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) contract. These data came from the National Survey of Parents and Youth (NSPY) which was developed to evaluate the efforts of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign sponsored by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). Young people and their parents were questioned about their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors around drug use.

What did they find?
Marijuana Initiation Rates:

To demonstrate the change in marijuana initiation rates over time, researchers analyzed a sample

of survey responses collected from youth age 10 to 16 years and their parents. 4,607 youth reported that they had never used marijuana. However, yearly follow-up interviews of the same youth indicated initiation of marijuana as documented by a "yes" response to the question, "Have you ever, even once, used marijuana?"

Among this sample of 4,607 youth who reported having initiated marijuana use at some point between age 11 and 17, the researchers found the following:

- Between age 10 and 16, marijuana initiation rates increased dramatically from 1.30 percent for 10-year-olds to 16.29 percent for 16-year-olds.
- Youth were most likely to initiate marijuana use between age 13 and 15 .
- After the percentage of youth who had initiated marijuana use reached its highest level (age 16), the trend line appeared to move downward.

What did they find?

Factors Associated with Marijuana Initiation Rates: Using the attitude, belief and behavior data gathered from the youth and their parents, the researchers identified factors that predict marijuana initiation in adolescence. Researchers also tracked changes in parental and peer influence over time.

Researchers found the following:

- No significant gender differences were found.
- Among youth in all age groups, the two strongest predictors of marijuana initiation in adolescence were:
 - 1) alcohol and/or tobacco use, and
 - 2) being offered marijuana by someone (These findings also have been reported in previous studies).

Source: Tang, Z., & Orwin, R. G. (2009). Marijuana initiation among American youth and its risk as dynamic processes: Prospective findings from a national longitudinal study. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 44(2), 195-211.

What Coalitions Can Do
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- o **Implement parenting programs and education earlier— while parents have a child in pre to early adolescence—**
The finding that parents have a stronger influence during the earlier adolescent years tells us that it is important to intervene early in a child's life. Teach parents how to be better at monitoring their children and educate them on the impact that their own use can have on the outcomes of their young adolescents.
- o **Target prevention efforts at reducing the initiation of alcohol and cigarette use among adolescents of all ages—**
Alcohol and cigarette use predicted marijuana initiation among all age groups. Prevention professionals who find ways to stop adolescents from trying alcohol and cigarettes, are more likely to reduce the rates at which young people in their community initiate marijuana use.
- o **Work with schools and families and other community members more closely on fostering environments where young people are less likely to be offered marijuana by peers and others—**
The research tells us that being offered marijuana by someone greatly increases the odds that an adolescent will initiate marijuana use. To help prevent this situation parents and family members should keep a close eye on what their adolescents are doing while with friends; schools should efficiently monitor school campuses; and law enforcement should be encouraged to keep a close watch at local parks and during community events.
- o **Provide support to young people at all stages of adolescence— teach youth resistance skills, educate them on social norms, provide support for young people struggling with school work and provide them with life skills training—**
Supporting young people in these aspects of their lives can reduce their initiation of drug use. Providing youth with support could greatly affect new instances of marijuana initiation among other youth who are influenced by peers.

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