

## Marijuana Use Up Among Juveniles Arrested in 2013

According to the National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)<sup>1</sup>, marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States, with over 18.9 million past month users in 2012. In addition, since 2007, the number of daily or almost daily users has increased (from 5.1 million to 7.6 million) and the percent who perceive that the drug carries great risk has declined (from 55% to 44%). In regard to use by youth, 57 percent of the prior year initiates of marijuana were under the age of 18 when they began use (1.4 million individuals).

Locally, the use of marijuana among at-risk youth (those arrested and booked into a local juvenile detention facility as part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring or SAM Program) has increased over time, from 42 percent positive for the drug in 2000 to 53 percent in 2013, the highest rate since the program was implemented locally. Other indicators from the study that suggest greater availability and use by youth, as well as decreased perception of risk, include:

- Nine out of every ten (90%) youth reported they had tried marijuana and of those who had ever tried it, the average age of first use was 12.3.
- Almost two-thirds (62%) of those interviewed who had ever used a substance reported the first they had tried was marijuana, up from 35 percent in 2009 (when alcohol was the most commonly used substance).
- Almost nine in ten (88%) youth reported that marijuana was “very easy” or “easy” to get, following only tobacco (at 90%).
- Only 16 percent of those who had ever used marijuana thought it was “very bad” or “bad” for them, compared to 34 percent for alcohol and 58 percent for tobacco.
- Of those who tested positive for marijuana, 58 percent reported they had ridden in a car with someone under the influence, 42 percent had gone to school drunk or high, 41 percent had gotten in a physical fight while drunk/high, 30 percent had missed school because of being drunk/high, and 18 percent had driven under the influence.
- When those who tested positive for marijuana were asked the main source of information about drugs, 46 percent said their friends, 17 percent school, 11 percent the media/on-line, and only 3 percent said parents.

- 62% of SAM youth report marijuana was the first drug used and the average age of first use was just over 12.
- 88% say marijuana is “very easy” or “easy” to obtain.
- Only 16% of marijuana users perceive its use was “very bad” or “bad” for them.

While a discussion of the pros and cons of legalizing marijuana use is beyond the scope of this CJ Flash, there does appear to be a general consensus that if marijuana is legalized, it would only be legal for adults, and not for juveniles. As such, regardless of one’s position on this issue, it is important to continue the discussion of what risks any substance use can pose to our nation’s youth and to encourage stakeholders across our diverse communities to have open and honest discussions about marijuana and other drug use with our next generation. For additional statistics and information from the 2013 series of SAM CJ Bulletins published by SANDAG, please visit [www.sandag.org/cj](http://www.sandag.org/cj).

---

<sup>1</sup> SAMHSA (2013). *Results from the 2012 NSDUH: Summary of National Findings*. Rockville, MD: Author.