

Skip it!

Reasons to reject marijuana commercialization in your community



Today's commercialized marijuana has little to do with a natural plant. Instead, manufacturers distill THC, the high-inducing ingredient from the marijuana plant, to potency levels far beyond anything ever seen in nature. Then they place this concentrate into vape pens, asthma inhalers, dissolvable powders and mouth sprays, in addition to cookies, brownies and candies. Over 50% of Colorado high-schoolers that reported using marijuana in the past 30 days used concentrates like dabbing and vaping. This translates to 10% of all Colorado high-schoolers.

Runaway marijuana potency is a problem caused by commercialization. In the early 1990s, average THC content in confiscated marijuana samples was less than 4%.¹ Marijuana potency increases have accelerated in the past decade as marijuana commercialization expanded. Colorado's average potency² of marijuana increased approximately 20% in just the first four years (2014-2017) of commercial sales, from an average of 16.4% to 19.6% THC for marijuana bud and from an average of 56.6% to 68.6% THC for marijuana concentrates. There are products sold that approach 90% THC.

Ultra-potent pot will dominate the market. Profit margins³ are high for processed products containing concentrated THC. Almost 93% of products sold in Colorado have a potency greater than 15% THC, according to a 2020 report⁴ on marijuana potency in Colorado.

These ultra-potent THC products are not safe. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment just completed an analysis⁵ of the health effects of THC concentration in Colorado's legal market that warned that "it is clear that use of products with high concentrations of THC are associated with higher rates of psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia, psychosis, and generalized anxiety."

Children suffer harm from the commercialization and normalization of this drug. The U.S. Surgeon General⁶ recently said that no amount of marijuana use is safe for the developing brain of an adolescent. A staggering 32% of Colorado youth that reported using marijuana in the past 30 days reported driving while high compared to just 9% two short years ago.

It is a myth that marijuana commercialization will keep marijuana out of the hands of kids. According to a state survey,⁷ high school students in Colorado Springs, a town that did not commercialize marijuana, were less likely to have tried marijuana and had a higher perception of harm from use than students in the neighboring towns of Denver and Pueblo where marijuana stores abound. A low perception of harm is a key indicator of future use.

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Many of these radically new, ultra-potent products seem tailor-made for kids. Colorado experienced a statistically significant increase⁸ across the state in youth vaping and dabbing (when THC resin is heated with a blow torch and inhaled) ultra-potent concentrates. So Colorado youth now are dabbing at almost three times the rate of Colorado adults and vaping marijuana at higher rates than adults, according to the latest official state A data.⁹ Products like vape pens, mouth sprays and dissolvable powders are easy to hide at home and school. The sweet-flavored edibles appeal to young palates.

Where there is more marijuana commercialization there is more youth use. Research out of California¹⁰ shows that young people aged 18-22 who live in neighborhoods with more sales outlets and storefront signage use marijuana more frequently than their peers and have a more positive view of the drug. Trends seen previously with tobacco and alcohol.

News of marijuana commercialization sweeping the nation is greatly exaggerated. In Colorado, the first state to legalize recreational marijuana in 2012, almost 70%¹¹ of local municipalities do not have adult-use marijuana commercialization, according to the Colorado Municipal League. While the personal right to grow and use marijuana for any reason vested upon all Colorado citizens 21 and older, the commercialization of marijuana through stores, cultivation centers and product manufacturers was not automatic. This important power was left to local control and many local communities opted out. Colorado communities that permitted pot shops now are faced with pressure to open pot clubs, consumption in mobile buses and marijuana delivery.

Marijuana commercialization may fundamentally change the characteristics of your community. Denver¹² is now known for having more pot shops than McDonalds and Starbucks combined. This shocking fact does not even account for the businesses tied to commercialization that impact quality of life. Denver has approximately 200 cultivation centers, warehouses plumbed and amped for year-round indoor growing cycles, as well as 95 marijuana-infused products manufacturers. Denver has a full time employee who investigates marijuana odor complaints.¹³ Marketing and advertising abounds and includes billboards, swag and bombarding on social media platforms.

Marijuana tax revenues will not cover social costs of commercialization nor cure budget shortfalls. In Colorado, where both an excise tax and a special sales tax are levied, the "sin" taxes (also including alcohol and tobacco products) make up approximately 2.6%¹⁴ of the state's annual gross revenue. Although a complete and unbiased analysis of costs and benefits of commercialization has not been conducted, anticipated costs include: healthcare, traffic accidents and fatalities, lost workplace productivity, lost educational attainment. Benefits from criminal justice reform can be achieved from decriminalization without commercialization.

Marijuana commercialization will not stop the black market, only effective enforcement does. A Colorado state-funded report¹⁵ found that the dangerous new marijuana products produced by the legal market do get into the hands of kids. Another study found that seizures of Colorado marijuana in the U.S. mail system increased by 1,042%¹⁶ after legalization.

Sources:

Image: <http://www.thcphotos.org>

¹ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive>

² <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/MED%202017%20Market%20Study%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

³ <https://www.civilized.life/articles/profit-margins-cannabis-infused-edibles/>

⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eQSkZvgRFuY_KnKYXVYnbgnd2SU7WQhj/view?usp=drivesdk

⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eQSkZvgRFuY_KnKYXVYnbgnd2SU7WQhj/view?usp=drivesdk

⁶ <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/healthy-kids-colorado-survey-data>

⁸ <https://marijuanahealthinfo.colorado.gov/health-data/healthy-kids-colorado-survey-hkcs-data>

⁹ <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/healthy-kids-colorado-survey-data>

¹⁰ <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2019/06/17.html>

¹¹ https://www.cml.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/issues/marijuana/retail/recreational-marijuana-status-december-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=f9516330_0

¹² <https://mjbizdaily.com/marijuana-store-density-surpasses-starbucks-and-mcdonalds-in-many-mature-cannabis-markets/>

¹³ <https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/12/04/784596282/will-the-entire-city-smell-like-pot-your-legal-weed-questions-answered>

¹⁴ <https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/fy19-20apprept.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/MED%20Demand%20and%20Market%20%20Study%20%20082018.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://rmhidta.org/files/D2DF/FINAL-Volume6.pdf>

One Chance to Grow Up is an initiative developed by Smart Colorado that focuses on protecting kids across the nation from the dangers of today's marijuana. We serve as a reliable resource for parents, media, policymakers, and all those who care about kids. Started by concerned parents, we're a 501(c)(3) nonprofit supported by charitable contributions.

