Marijuana Regulation and Teen Use Rates

Since the mid-1990s, self-reported lifetime use of cannabis has fallen 46 percent among 8th-graders, 25 percent among 10th-graders, and ten percent among 12th-graders.

Thirty states have legalized the medical use of cannabis, and eight of those states have also regulated the adult use of marijuana, since that time. Monitoring the Future, Trends in Lifetime Prevalence of Use of Various Drugs, 2016

Since 2002, perceived availability of marijuana among young people has fallen dramatically nationwide.

"Between 2002 and 2015, we observed a 27% overall reduction in the relative proportion of adolescents ages 12-17-and a 42 percent reduction among those ages 12-14-reporting that it would be "very easy" to obtain marijuana. This pattern was uniformly observed among youth in all sociodemographic subgroups. ... Despite the legalization of recreational and medical marijuana in some states, our findings suggest that ... perceptions that marijuana would be very easy to obtain are on the decline among American youth." Trends in perceived access to marijuana among adolescents in the United States: 2002-2015, Journal of Studies of Alcohol and Drugs, 2017

"From 2002 to 2014, ... the perceived availability decreased by 13 percent among persons aged 12-17 years and by three percent among persons aged 18-25 years." United States Centers for Disease Control, National Estimates of Marijuana Use and Related Indicators - National Survey on Drug Use and Health, United States, 2002-2014, 2016

Rates of problematic cannabis use by young people has declined 24 percent between 2002 and 2013.


The enactment of medical cannabis laws is not associated with any causal upticks in youth marijuana use

"The evidence from large nationally representative surveys has not consistently demonstrated that MMLs (medical marijuana laws) have increased adolescent cannabis use. Adolescent use is higher in states that have passed MMLs, but this reflects higher rates of use before the passage of MMLs." Has the legalisation of medical and recreational cannabis use in the USA affected the prevalence of cannabis use and cannabis use disorders? Current Addiction Reports

"This systematic review screened 2999 unique papers retrieved from 17 sources, yielding 21 unique studies. Ultimately, 11 studies passed secondary exclusion criteria designed to ensure optimal study quality. ... [A]ll estimates of pre–post changes in past-month marijuana use within MML (medical marijuana law) states from these studies were non-significant. ... In summary, current evidence does not support the hypothesis that MML passage is associated with increased marijuana use"
The passage of adult use cannabis laws is not associated with any causal upticks in youth marijuana use in those jurisdictions that have enacted them.

There has been "no significant change in past 30-day use of marijuana between 2013 (19.7%) and 2017 (19.4%). Also, in 2017, the use rates were not different from the national 30-day use rates reported by the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. In 2017, 19.4% of Colorado high school students reported using marijuana in the past 30-days compared to 19.8% of high school students nationally that reported this behavior."

"[W]e did not find a significant effect for perceived wrongfulness, perceived ease of access, or perceived parental disapproval. We did not find significant variability in past 30-day use by demographic characteristics or by school and community factors from 2013 to 2015. We did not find a significant effect associated with the introduction of legal sales of recreational marijuana to adults in Colorado on adolescent (illegal) use."

"Medical marijuana laws and adolescent marijuana use in the United States: A systematic review and meta-analysis, Addiction, 2018"