

# Marijuana—Common, Dangerous, and Still Illegal



**C**ontrary to popular belief, not all teens smoke pot. Only about one in five 10th graders report they used marijuana within the past month. Fewer than one in four high school seniors is a current marijuana user.

Marijuana—pot, reefer, grass, joint, stick, ganja, rope, blunts, smoke, bud, weed, bhang—is one of the most widely used illicit drugs in the United States and very few young people use other illegal drugs without first trying marijuana

Just because it's common doesn't mean marijuana is safe. In fact, the marijuana sold today is far stronger than it was two or three decades ago, and far more dangerous.

## What You May Not Know

Some people may think that smoking a joint is just a “mellow” way to relax. They don't realize that using marijuana can cause

- memory problems
- reduced concentration and coordination
- increased appetite
- decreased inhibitions
- bloodshot eyes, dry mouth, and dry throat
- lower testosterone levels and sperm counts in men
- increased testosterone in women, which can cause acne and increased facial and body hair
- paranoia
- diminished or complete loss of sexual pleasure
- psychological dependence so that over time, more of the drug is needed to get the same effect.

## Damage

Marijuana smokers face the same cancer risks as tobacco smokers, even though they may smoke only a few joints a day compared to a pack or more of cigarettes. Damage from smoking pot includes

- deteriorating performance at school or at work
- experiencing a “burn out” characterized by muddled thinking, acute frustration, depression, and isolation
- impaired sexual development and fertility, including production of abnormal sperm and menstrual irregularities
- damage to lungs and pulmonary system (one marijuana joint is equal to approximately 25 commercial cigarettes)
- exposure to illegal drug culture.

## Marijuana Is Still Illegal

While there are groups who encourage the legalization of marijuana, it is still illegal. Depending on where an individual is arrested, penalties for possession, use, and dealing can be harsh. Convicted individuals face fines, possible imprisonment, a criminal record, and lost job opportunities.

Some people are confused about marijuana's medical uses. There are no medically accepted uses for smoking marijuana. THC, the active chemical in marijuana, is manufactured into a pill and available with a prescription to treat nausea and vomiting that occur with some cancer treatments and to help people with AIDS gain weight.