



Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (RMHIDTA)

Colorado Youth Marijuana Use:

Up – Down – Flat?

Examine the Data and You Decide!

DENVER – On June 21, 2016, *The Denver Post* published an article “Survey: Pot use among Colorado teens flat,” based on the recently-released 2015 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS) recently released Rocky Mountain HIDTA has been inundated with inquiries regarding this article and, therefore, prepared a response for clarification and consideration by the reader. For purposes of this response, marijuana use refers to past month or past 30 days marijuana use that is the criteria used in the surveys. The most recent (2015/2016) Rocky Mountain HIDTA publications on the impact of marijuana legalization in Colorado reported:

Federal National Survey

- According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an annual survey by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):
 - When recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado, youth ages 12 – 17 past month marijuana use increased 20 percent comparing the two-year average just prior to legalization (2011/2012) to the two-year average when legalized (2013/2014).
 - The 2013/2014 survey results show Colorado youth ranked No. 1 in the nation for past month marijuana use, up from No. 4 in 2011/2012.
 - Colorado youth past month marijuana use for 2013/2014 was 74 percent higher than the national average (12.56 percent vs. 7.22 percent).

What do School Resource Officers Say?

- In a 2015 survey of 95 school resource officers, 90 percent responded that, since marijuana legalization, they have seen an increase in marijuana-related incidents in their schools.
- In the same survey, when asked where the students are getting their marijuana, 18 percent said from the black market and 81 percent cited friends who get it legally, parents, or marijuana businesses.

What do School Counselors Say?

- In a similar survey of 188 school counselors, 69 percent responded that, since marijuana legalization, they have seen an increase in marijuana-related incidents in their school.
- In the same survey, when asked where the students are getting their marijuana, 18 percent said the black market while 82 percent cited friends who get it legally, family members, or marijuana businesses.

State of Colorado Survey

Colorado recently released the results of their Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS) as reported in the Tuesday, June 21, 2016 issue of *The Denver Post* with the article titled, “Survey: Pot use among Colo. teens flat.” The article does point out that the 2013 HKCS data shows 19.7 percent of teens had used marijuana in the past month compared to 21.2 percent in 2015. Although this is a 7.6 percent increase, the article states the increase is “not statistically significant.”

- The article states that, in 2009, the rate was 24.8 percent but failed to explain that the 2013 and 2015 surveys were much different sampling sizes and the survey method changed, thus impacting any comparisons.
- The article cites the Centers for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to indicate that “marijuana use among teens nationwide also remained flat...” They failed to mention that Oregon and Washington, states with legalized marijuana, and Minnesota did not participate in the 2015 YRBS. There were also ten states, including Colorado, with unweighted results because their state survey participation rate did not meet the 60 percent participation standard set by YRBS.

On June 22, 2016, *The Denver Post* Editorial Board released an editorial titled, “Colorado’s good news on teen pot use,” based on the 2015 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey. There are numerous important points related to the survey not addressed in the article and editorial:

Bad News (see Page 7)

- Marijuana use among Colorado high school junior and senior students increased 19 percent and 14 percent respectively from 2013 to 2015.
- Only 48 percent of high school students surveyed see marijuana as risky compared to 54 percent of those surveyed two years earlier.

- One out of 3 Denver high school juniors and seniors surveyed are marijuana users (a 20 percent increase from 2013 to 2015).
- There was nearly a 50 percent increase in the Boulder/Broomfield region high school junior and senior marijuana users.
- Region 12, consisting of Colorado mountain resort communities to include Grand (Grand Lake), Summit (Breckenridge and Keystone), Eagle (Vail and Beaver Creek), Pitkin (Aspen) and Garfield (Glenwood Springs) Counties, saw a 90 percent increase in marijuana users among their high school seniors and a 54.7 percent increase among sophomores.
- Region 11, consisting of Moffat, Rio Blanco, Jackson and Routt (Steamboat Springs) Counties saw increases of 22.2 percent for freshmen, 72.0 percent for sophomores, 18.8 percent for juniors and 57.3 percent for seniors.
- Ten out of the 17 regions, with sufficient participation to be counted, saw an overall increase in marijuana use.

Yes, There is Good News (See Page 7)

- Region 10, which includes Montrose and Gunnison, and four neighboring counties, had a major decrease in marijuana users in all four high school grades. This decrease was 51.8 percent among freshmen to 24.7 percent among seniors.
- Region 17, which includes Clear Creek, Park and Teller Counties, saw an overall 17.1 percent decrease including a 53.7 percent drop in freshmen marijuana users and a 34.3 percent drop in senior users. However, the survey does show an increase in sophomore users (12.7 percent) and junior users (7.6 percent).
- Seven out of 17 regions, with sufficient participation to be counted, saw an overall decrease in marijuana users.

- The question should be raised as to what message is getting through to students in the regions experiencing overall decreases in marijuana use but missing in those regions experiencing increases in use.

Other Potentially Pertinent Information

- Jefferson County (the 2nd largest school district), Douglas County (the 3rd largest school district), El Paso County (Colorado Springs, 2nd largest metro area), and Weld County results were listed as N/A which means data not available due to low participation in the region. NOTE: This is a similar reason why HKCS results were considered unweighted by the national YRBS survey.
- In 2015 the HKCS survey had a response rate of 46 percent, which is well below the 60 percent rate required by YRBS. Even though HKCS samples a large number of students, their participation rate is below the industry standard for weighted data.

Bottom Line

- Is the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey “good news” and is Colorado teen marijuana use “flat?” The reader can examine the facts and data to make an informed decision. What is clear is that there is no overall pattern in the HKCS data; thus it is best to refrain from jumping to conclusions on such an important issue. The HKCS results are highly variable between class years and regions from major increases to major decreases.

Examples of variances include:

- There was a 57.5 percent increase in use among one region’s freshmen while a 53.4 percent decrease in another.
- In one region there was a 72.0 percent increase in high school sophomore use but, in another, a 38.9 percent decrease.
- One region for juniors shows a 49.8 percent increase and another, a 33.1 percent decrease.

- In one region, high school seniors had a 90.0 percent increase and in another a 34.3 percent decrease.

The key is to determine what factors contribute to these major variances across the state and to, therefore, learn what effective tools were used in those regions that successfully reduced marijuana use among some Colorado students.

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Source: Healthy Kids Colorado Survey

[http://www.chd.dphe.state.co.us/topics.aspx?q=Adolescent Health Data](http://www.chd.dphe.state.co.us/topics.aspx?q=Adolescent_Health_Data)

Region	Counties	Total By Region 2013	Total by Region 2015	By Region Percent Change	9th Grade 2013	9th Grade 2015	9th Grade Percent Change	10th Grade 2013	10th Grade 2015	10th Grade Percent Change	11th Grade 2013	11th Grade 2015	11th Grade Percent Change	12th Grade 2013	12th Grade 2015	12th Grade Percent Change
1	logan, sedgwick, phillips, yuma, washington, morgan	11.4	11.8	3.5%	5.2	2.8	-46.2%	11.0	13.2	20.0%	18.4	16.8	-8.7%	10.5	14.9	41.9%
2	larimer	16.9	17.6	4.1%	11.0	8.7	-20.9%	15.6	13.0	-16.7%	20.8	25.9	24.5%	21.2	21.9	3.3%
3	douglas	13.2	*NA	NA	6.3	*NA	NA	12.9	*NA	NA	15.9	*NA	NA	18.8	*NA	NA
4	el paso	14.8	NA	NA	7.1	NA	NA	15.5	NA	NA	14.8	NA	NA	19.9	NA	NA
5	elbert, lincoln, kit carson, cheyenne	9.4	9.7	3.2%	9.2	NA	NA	6.6	NA	NA	13.9	NA	NA	8.7	NA	NA
6	huerfano, las animas, baca, otero, bent, prowers, crowley, kiowa	17.6	20.1	14.2%	14.9	14.9	0.0%	17.4	21.4	23.0%	17.2	22.0	27.9%	20.9	24.1	15.3%
7	pueblo	32.1	30.1	-6.2%	26.2	22.9	-12.6%	32.2	28.1	-12.7%	36.6	34.6	-5.5%	33.6	36.3	8.0%
8	saguache, mineral, rio grande, alamosa, conejos, costilla	23.1	19.7	-14.7%	17.6	17.4	-1.1%	24.3	18.6	-23.5%	25.4	17.0	-33.1%	25.9	26.9	3.9%
9	delores, san juan, montezuma, la plata, archuleta	24.6	26.2	6.5%	18.7	22.3	19.3%	20.7	26.1	26.1%	33.3	27.4	-17.7%	26.9	29.5	9.7%
10	san miguel, montrose, delta, gunnison, hindsdale, ouray	26.7	17.5	-34.5%	19.3	9.3	-51.8%	29.3	17.9	-38.9%	26.6	18.1	-32.0%	32.0	24.1	-24.7%
11	moffat, routt, jackson, rio blanco	14.3	19.7	37.8%	8.1	9.9	22.2%	8.2	14.1	72.0%	18.1	21.5	18.8%	22.5	35.4	57.3%
12	garfield, pitkin, eagle, summit, grand	19.7	24.5	24.4%	16.0	10.8	-32.5%	13.7	21.2	54.7%	29.9	29.2	-2.3%	20.1	38.2	90.0%
13	lake, chaffee, fremont, custard	22.9	23.5	2.6%	15.5	16.4	5.8%	18.4	21.9	19.0%	30.5	25.0	-18.0%	27.7	30.2	9.0%
14	adams	22.8	20.6	-9.6%	22.0	14.6	-33.6%	21.0	20.6	-1.9%	25.3	25.5	0.8%	23.2	21.0	-9.5%
15	arapahoe	20.6	20.2	-1.9%	13.0	13.9	6.9%	19.8	16.7	-15.7%	22.0	21.6	-1.8%	26.5	27.3	3.0%
16	boulder, broomfield	20.3	24.1	18.7%	9.8	4.9	-50.0%	21.6	17.9	-17.1%	22.3	33.4	49.8%	28.5	42.2	48.1%
17	gilpin, clear creek, park, teller	25.1	20.8	-17.1%	19.0	8.8	-53.7%	21.2	23.9	12.7%	27.8	29.9	7.6%	31.8	20.9	-34.3%
18	weld	18.6	NA	NA	9.9	NA	NA	19.1	NA	NA	19.1	NA	NA	29.6	NA	NA
19	mesa	17.2	21.2	23.3%	8.7	13.7	57.5%	17.4	26.2	50.6%	22.7	21.6	-4.8%	20.2	24.4	20.8%
20	denver	26.6	26.1	-1.9%	23.8	17.7	-25.6%	25.3	19.3	-23.7%	29.0	37.7	30.0%	30.0	33.3	11.0%
21	jefferson	*NA	NA	NA	*NA	NA	NA	*NA	NA	NA	*NA	NA	NA	*NA	NA	NA

N/A: Data not available due to low participation in region.

*N/A: Region 21 – Jefferson County did not participate in the 2013 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey