

Marijuana: Why You Should Care

Increased Potency and Its Potential Impact

Much stronger marijuana could lead to higher rates of abuse and addiction

The marijuana available today is much stronger than it used to be. The main psychoactive component in marijuana is called THC (short for tetrahydrocannabinol). This drug is similar to natural cannabinoid receptors in the brain and creates the high that recreational users are after.

- In the 1960s, marijuana had an average content of 1% THC^{1,2}.
- By 1980, THC content had increased to just over 3%, and by the mid 1990s to just under 4%^{1,2}.
- By 2007, the potency had doubled to 8% THC, and then jumped to 12% by 2012^{1,2}. Current THC contents reach 15%⁵.
- The THC extracts known as hash and hash oil have also become much stronger, reaching potencies that range from 15% to 80% THC^{1,2,5}.

"...the consequences of marijuana use may be worse now than in the past and may account for the significant increases in emergency department visits by persons reporting marijuana use³."

These increasing rates of potency are alarming to both policy makers and addiction specialists, raising concerns that, "...the consequences of marijuana use may be worse now than in the past and may account for the significant increases in emergency department visits by persons reporting marijuana use³." (See graphs on other side.)

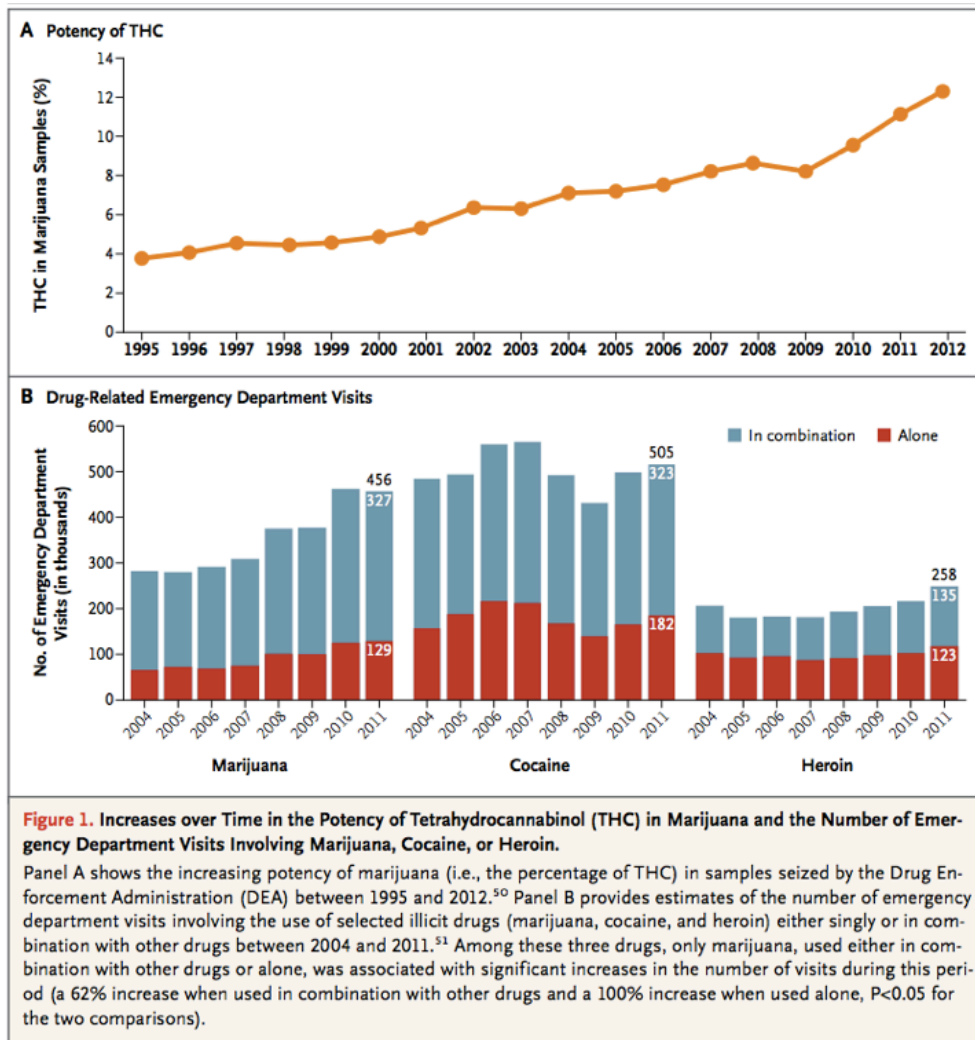
In addition to the psychotic episodes and racing hearts that cause emergency room visits, there is concern that increased potency will lead to higher rates of abuse, dependence, and addiction, particularly among people who start using marijuana in their teen years. Among the primary risk factors for addiction are age of first use, heavy use, and persistent use⁴.

1. Mehmedic, Z., et al. Potency Trends of D9-THC and Other Cannabinoids in Confiscated Cannabis Preparations from 1993 to 2008. *The Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 55(5) 2010.
2. ElSohly, M.A. Potency Monitoring Program quarterly report no.123 — reporting period: 09/16/2013-12/15/2013. Oxford: University of Mississippi, National Center for Natural Products Research, 2014.
3. Nora D. Volkow, M.D. et al. Adverse Health Affects of Marijuana Use. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 370:2219-27 2014.
4. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Annual Report
5. Celia Watson Seupel. Dabs – marijuana’s explosive secret. CNBC, 26 Feb 2014. <http://www.cnbc.com/2014/02/26/dabsmarijuanas-explosive-secret.html>



Community coalitions working to prevent
substance abuse in Vermont

100 State Street, Suite 352 • Montpelier, VT 05602
preventionworks@fairpoint.net • 802-279-4309
preventionworksvt.org



From Volkow et al. Adverse Health Affects of Marijuana Use. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2014;370:2219-27. Note that marijuana emergency room visits now greatly outnumber heroin-related visits and are almost as numerous as visits due to cocaine.