Cannabis use and youth

It’s important to note that while cannabis can have positive medicinal effects for some individuals, it can negatively impact youth who use and abuse drugs. I spoke with Carlos T. Carter, President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, about his thoughts on cannabis and youth.

What are your thoughts on the rising use of cannabis?

I think there are a lot of positive medicinal effects that can help people manage pain, but it’s alarming that cannabis use increased after legalization. People need to be educated on proper use of cannabis.

Do you believe there’s a link between increased cannabis use and the pandemic?

I believe that increased isolation has all led to youth using cannabis.

What are some factors that are driving youth to use cannabis?

Increased poverty, in particular for the Black community, would lead youth to seek out marijuana to self-medicate.

What are some qualitative and quantitative factors that you have observed?

We have seen a large number of people using cannabis than any other illicit substance.

Do you believe that there has been an increase in the use of cannabis cards in Pennsylvania?

Yes, it’s easier to become a medical marijuana card holder.

What is your opinion on the state of Pennsylvania’s marijuana laws?

I think it needs improvement. I don’t think the law is created with the intention of helping patients.

What is your opinion on the rising number of marijuana dispensaries?

It’s not worth it. Quite literally, they could lose their lives.

What are the long-term effects of cannabis use?

Long-term use can lead to addiction. The CDC estimates about 50% of cannabis users have a cannabis use disorder.

What is your opinion on Marijana influencers who promote cannabis use?

It also concerns me that people are being marketed to.

What are your thoughts on the link between cannabis use and the pandemic?

It’s important to note that cannabis use and the pandemic have increased. Dr. Natacha DeGenna, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh studies cannabis and speech disorders.

What are the effects of cannabis on the brain?

Brain development has been stunted by the pandemic.

What is your opinion on the use of cannabis by young people?

As more states legalize cannabis, it will still be illegal for anyone under 21. Why? Because, like alcohol, cannabis can harm developing brains.

What does the research say on cannabis use and black youth?

Short-term cannabis use may lead to problems in school, trouble remembering things, aggressive acts, car accidents, and risky sexual behavior. It can also interfere with prescription drugs. If a user has mental health conditions, cannabis may make them worse.

What should young people do if they smoke marijuana?

Health care providers are making it easier to become a medical cannabis card holder, so I think awareness is key. I think the law needs to be changed to offer positive effects for patients.

What are the health risks of using cannabis?

Cannabis can cause a lot of side effects. It can cause impairment, increased isolation has all led to youth using cannabis.

Are you using cannabis in a way that adds to your life or takes away from it? Are you smoking weed occasionally for friends, for example, or smoking it alone because you’re not in a social setting?

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