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PRINT TEXT

Medical marijuana laws creating pot fiends? What study shows

By David W Freeman Topics News, Research, Medical Marijuana

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(Credit: istockphoto)

(CBS) Does legalizing marijuana for medicinal use turn young people into pot fiends? New data from Rhode Island - which legalized medical marijuana in 2006 - suggest it doesn't.

PICTURES - Medical marijuana: Which 16 states permit pot?

The data, presented Wednesday at a meeting of the American Public Health Association, were based on a survey of 32,570 students from Rhode Island and neighboring Massachusetts between 1997 and 2009.

The data showed that while pot use was widespread in the states during the time period, there were no significant differences in rates of marijuana use between the states in any given year.

Sixteen states (including Rhode Island) currently permit the use of medical marijuana, but Massachusetts isn't one of them.

The study's lead author, Dr. Esther Choo, an emergency room physician at Rhode Island Hospital, told Time that the population of people who use marijuana for medicinal purposes is small - and not the sort of people teens are eager to emulate.

"Whether they are taking it for pain or for vomiting control or appetite, this is not a group we think of as super-inspiring for young people," she said.

What do other experts say?

Proponents of medical marijuana say the weed can help curb symptoms of cancer, AIDS, multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, and other conditions, according to ProCon.org. Opponents question pot's effectiveness and say the stuff is dangerous and can serve as a "gateway" to other, more dangerous substances.

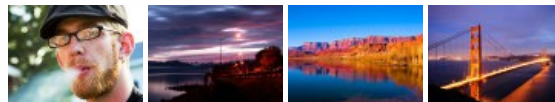
The American Medical Association has called for marijuana laws to be reviewed to facilitate research and promote development of drugs based on the "cannabinoid" compounds in pot - but adds in its most recent policy statement on pot that "this should not be viewed as an endorsement of state-based cannabis programs, the legalization of marijuana, or that scientific evidence on the therapeutic use of cannabis meets the current standards for a prescription drug product."

What do you think? Should medical marijuana be legal everywhere? Or would that put kids at risk?

18 Photos

Medical marijuana: Which 16 states permit pot?

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