

## POLICY STATEMENT

Organizational Principles to Guide and Define the Child Health Care System and/or Improve the Health of All Children

Committee on Substance Abuse and Committee on Adolescence

### Legalization of Marijuana: Potential Impact on Youth

**ABSTRACT.** As experts in the health care of children and adolescents, pediatricians may be called on to advise legislators concerning the potential impact of changes in the legal status of marijuana on adolescents. Parents, too, may look to pediatricians for advice as they consider whether to support state-level initiatives that propose to legalize the use of marijuana for medical purposes or to decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana. This policy statement provides the position of the American Academy of Pediatrics on the issue of marijuana legalization, and the accompanying technical report (available online) reviews what is currently known about the relationship between adolescents' use of marijuana and its legal status to better understand how change might influence the degree of marijuana use by adolescents in the future. *Pediatrics* 2004;113:1825–1826; marijuana, legalization, substance abuse, decriminalization.

#### INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse by adolescents is an ongoing concern of pediatricians. Marijuana is the illicit substance most commonly abused by adolescents.<sup>1</sup> Any change in the legal status of marijuana, even if limited to adults, could affect the prevalence of use among adolescents.<sup>2</sup> For example, tobacco and alcohol products, both legal for adults 18 and 21 years of age, respectively, are the psychoactive substances most widely abused by adolescents.

Marijuana currently is classified by the US Drug Enforcement Agency as a schedule I drug, which means that it has a high potential for abuse, has no currently accepted medical use in the United States, and lacks accepted safety for use under supervision by a physician. Rigorous scientific research to determine whether marijuana, especially cannabinoids, has any potential therapeutic effect is just beginning. In contrast, the significant neuropharmacologic, cognitive, behavioral, and somatic consequences of acute and long-term marijuana use are well known and include negative effects on short-term memory, concentration, attention span, motivation, and problem solving, which clearly interfere with learning; adverse effects on coordination, judgment, reaction time, and tracking ability, which contribute substantially to unintentional deaths and injuries among adolescents (especially those associated with motor vehicles); and negative health effects with repeated use similar to effects seen with smoking tobacco.<sup>3</sup>

More information, including historical perspec-

tives on the legal status of marijuana as well as concerns surrounding medicinal use of marijuana, is available in the accompanying technical report (available online).<sup>2</sup>

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The American Academy of Pediatrics opposes the legalization of marijuana.
2. The American Academy of Pediatrics supports rigorous scientific research regarding the use of cannabinoids for the relief of symptoms not currently ameliorated by existing legal drug formulations.

#### COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE, 2001–2002

Edward A. Jacobs, MD, Chairperson

\*Alain Joffe, MD, MPH

John R. Knight, MD

John Kulig, MD, MPH

Peter D. Rogers, MD, MPH

Janet F. Williams, MD

#### LIAISON

Deborah Simkin, MD

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

#### STAFF

Karen S. Smith

#### COMMITTEE ON ADOLESCENCE, 2001–2002

David W. Kaplan, MD, MPH, Chairperson

Angela Diaz, MD

Ronald A. Feinstein, MD

Martin M. Fisher, MD

Jonathan D. Klein, MD, MPH

Ellen S. Rome, MD, MPH

\*W. Samuel Yancy, MD

#### LIAISONS

Ann J. Davis, MD

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Glen Pearson, MD

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Jean-Yves Frappier, MD

Canadian Paediatric Society

#### STAFF

Karen S. Smith

\*Lead authors

## REFERENCES

1. Schydlower M. Preface. In: Schydlower M, ed. *Substance Abuse: A Guide for Health Professionals*. 2nd ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2002:viii-x
2. American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Substance Abuse and Committee on Adolescence. Technical report: legalization of marijuana: potential impact on youth. *Pediatrics*. 2004;113(6). Available at: [www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/113/6/e632](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/113/6/e632)
3. American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Substance Abuse. Marijuana: a continuing concern for pediatricians. *Pediatrics*. 1999;104:982-985

---

*All policy statements from the American Academy of Pediatrics automatically expire 5 years after publication unless reaffirmed, revised, or retired at or before that time.*

## Legalization of Marijuana: Potential Impact on Youth

*Pediatrics* 2004;113;1825

DOI: 10.1542/peds.113.6.1825

### Updated Information & Services

including high resolution figures, can be found at:  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/113/6/1825>

### References

This article cites 1 articles, 1 of which you can access for free at:  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/113/6/1825#BIBL>

### Subspecialty Collections

This article, along with others on similar topics, appears in the following collection(s):  
**Substance Use**  
[http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/substance\\_abuse\\_sub](http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/substance_abuse_sub)

### Permissions & Licensing

Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online at:  
<http://www.aappublications.org/site/misc/Permissions.xhtml>

### Reprints

Information about ordering reprints can be found online:  
<http://www.aappublications.org/site/misc/reprints.xhtml>

# American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



# PEDIATRICS<sup>®</sup>

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

## **Legalization of Marijuana: Potential Impact on Youth**

*Pediatrics* 2004;113;1825

DOI: 10.1542/peds.113.6.1825

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/113/6/1825>

Pediatrics is the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. A monthly publication, it has been published continuously since 1948. Pediatrics is owned, published, and trademarked by the American Academy of Pediatrics, 345 Park Avenue, Itasca, Illinois, 60143. Copyright © 2004 by the American Academy of Pediatrics. All rights reserved. Print ISSN: 1073-0397.

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN<sup>®</sup>

