

Youth answer questions on marijuana use

The Amherst Youth and Community Coalition is here to answer your questions. Although recreational marijuana use became legal for adults in

March 2021, many people are still unaware of the dangers of that use, especially in young people.

Marijuana use directly affects brain function — specifically the parts of the brain responsible for memory, learning, attention, decision making, coordination, emotions and reaction time. The impact of marijuana use on the brain depends on many factors, including:

- Amount of tetrahydrocannabinol (i.e., THC) in marijuana (in other words, the concentration or strength),
- How often it is used,



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- Age of first use, and
- Whether other substances (for example, tobacco or alcohol) are used at the same time.

Marijuana is addictive, especially to the young people in our community. Marijuana is associated with the development of schizophrenia and other psychoses. Marijuana may be linked to a worsening of symptoms in individuals with bipolar disorder.

Marijuana users are more likely to develop social anxiety disorder than nonusers.

Heavy marijuana users are more likely to report thoughts of suicide than nonusers and to have more accidents.

In 1995, marijuana had a THC content of about 4%. Today, the THC content can be as high as 99%, in part because of the different methods of use — gummies, vaping, etc.

So the question is, "Why is it [marijuana] legal in New York?"

One reason is that marijuana companies have spent about \$3 million in lobbying in New York over five years, targeting medical cannabis and the recreational pot debate. Another reason is anticipation of a large influx of cash into the state budget. Absolutely we will see a cash influx into the state's coffers, but we will also see increases in emergency room visits, crime, driving while impaired violations and motor vehicle accidents. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, marijuana affects brain development. Developing brains, such as those in babies, children and teenagers, are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of marijuana, and although scientists are still learning about the effects of marijuana on the developing brain, studies suggest that marijuana use by people during pregnancy may be linked to problems with attention, memory, problem-solving skills and behavior in their children later in life. The Amherst Youth and Community Coalition will continue to bring you information on cannabis and other substances through articles in this newspaper, using the newly launched website, www.amherstyouthandcommunity.org, and through presentations at schools, churches and other organizations. If you are interested in a presentation, please contact Anne Rohrer by phone at 716-631-7132 or by email at dfcgrant@amherst.ny.us. If you are interested in becoming part of the coalition, contact Kathy Mobarek Miller at the Amherst Youth and Recreation Department by phone at 716-631-7132. Just a few hours a month would go a long way in helping to provide a safe, healthy environment for our youth. We look forward to hearing from you.