

Thank you Senators Collett and Ward

I am Elyse Contreras, public health epidemiologist and manager of the Marijuana Health Monitoring Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. I have been invited today to speak to our experience in Colorado regarding marijuana legalization and the impact on children and adolescents.

I testify today as a public health practitioner. The role of my program has been to monitor three areas of public health interest since 2014:

1. The scientific literature for evidence of harms from recreational marijuana use
2. Marijuana use trends in the state
3. Occurrence of adverse health effects

My testimony today will focus on just two of our data sources and pertains to Colorado youth ages 0-18.

We rely on survey data to estimate the prevalence of middle school and high school students who use marijuana.

Our Healthy Kids Colorado Survey is a self-administered survey conducted every two years across the state. The most recent data we have is from the year 2019 (data collected from 2021 are currently being analyzed).

Some encouraging trends I wish to share with you from our 2019 Healthy Kids Survey include:

**Marijuana use has remained stable among Colorado adolescents since before legalization:**

- **5.2% middle school students reported using marijuana at least once in the 30-days (a stable trend since 2011)**
- **20.6% high school students reported using marijuana at least once in the 30-days (a stable trend since 2005)**

**Past 30-day marijuana use among high school students in Colorado is similar to the national average -both ~1 in 5 (20.6% in Colorado compared to 21.7% nationally).**

**When comparing substance use among high school students, past 30-day marijuana use is significantly lower than past 30-day alcohol use and past 30-day electronic cigarette use.**

Some concerning trends that we continue to monitor closely include:

**A significant increase in dabbing - a method of marijuana use that involves consuming highly concentrated marijuana products - increased from 6.9% of high school students in 2017 to 10.2% in 2019.**

**Smoking marijuana by comparison, remains the most prevalent method of use at 15.3%.**

**Also in 2019, more high school students reported driving a vehicle after recently using marijuana; that increased to 11.2% up from 9.0% in 2017.**

Another informative data source is our regional poison center data, which we monitor for health effects from marijuana exposures that are reported throughout the state.

Some key data points I wish to share are as follows;

**The highest number of marijuana exposures reported in Colorado are among children 0 to 5 years of age.**

**Increases in the number of exposures we've seen over time in this age group correlates with increases in unintentional ingestion of marijuana edible products.**

**In fact, the majority of edible exposures reported to the poison center are among children 0 to 5 years old.**

The findings I've shared today are publicly available at:

[Marijuanahealthinfo.colorado.gov](https://marijuanahealthinfo.colorado.gov)

I will conclude my testimony today with the following advice should the people of Pennsylvania decide to legalize;

1. Include public health representatives during policy making and
2. appropriately fund important public health activities such as surveillance, adult responsible use education and youth prevention messaging.

Thank you