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coalition news

Prevention news and information from the Tiverton Prevention Coalition

The Perfect Storm: Teens and the Increase of Medical Marijuana

When Rhode Island's [Medical Marijuana Act](#) is enacted in 2013, evidence indicates that without aggressive prevention, education and enforcement programs, communities across the state can expect an upsurge in marijuana use among teens.

In states with medical marijuana laws, studies show marijuana usage rates among youths age 12 to 17 are higher than in states that have not legalized medical marijuana. Teens in these states also have the highest drug addiction and abuse rates. Teens in states that have decriminalized marijuana fare no better. The DEA reported that after decriminalization in 11 states, teen drug rose to over 51%, the highest in the nation's history.

"The forecast isn't good," said Coalition coordinator Rebecca Elwell, "but we can learn from what is happening in other states and develop prevention programs to reduce the legislation's impact on communities, especially our teens."

One risk that teens face is increased availability of the drug. Grow houses in medical marijuana states typically produce many times what may be needed to treat patients with "debilitating diseases." Studies show that less than 6% of those who seek a recommendation for 'medical' marijuana have cancer, HIV/AIDS, glaucoma, or multiple sclerosis. The other 94% reported severe pain. In California, for example, the average marijuana card holder is a 34 year old white male with a history of marijuana and other drug use.

"While compassion for the sick and dying is noble, in reality medical marijuana quickly finds its way to the street," Elwell said. "Several trusted sources confirm that RI medical marijuana is already being sold on the street by drug dealers in Massachusetts and RI."



An even greater risk for risk-prone teens is decreased "perception of harm." Studies show that calling marijuana 'medical,' further reduces perception of harm. [The 2011 Monitoring the Future](#) study found that use among 10th and 12th graders have been climbing over the last 5 years, while perception of harm has been declining. States that have "medical" marijuana programs have among the lowest perceptions of harm among youth in the nation, which "should be a wake-up call to Tiverton," Elwell added. "In 2012, 56% of THS students reported they saw no serious harm associated with daily marijuana use."

Practicing Prevention: Parent Power

A new State Farm® survey in 2012 shows the majority of teens with driver's licenses, 57%, admit to texting while driving, despite the widespread attention surrounding the dangers of this risky practice, according to a State Farm [news release](#). These results come from a follow-up to a 2010 survey, and the numbers are virtually unchanged.

Fewer teens viewed texting while driving as leading to fatal consequences as compared to drinking while driving, despite research indicating the consequences of texting while driving can be as severe as drunk driving. *(continued on back)*

