

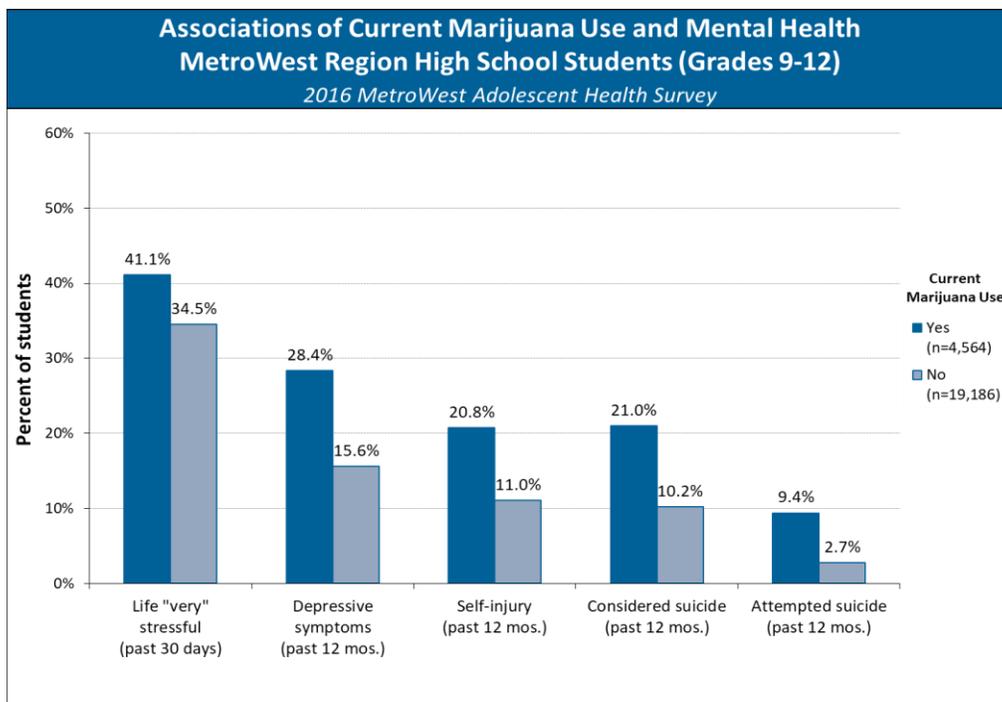
Associations of Youth Marijuana Use and Mental Health in MetroWest



According to the 2016 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 27.8% of high school students have used marijuana in their lifetime and 19.2% have used marijuana in the past 30 days. This represents a decrease in use, which peaked in 2010. Marijuana use continues to be lower in MetroWest than in the state and the nation.

Despite the overall decrease in use, there is concern among many medical and public health professionals in MetroWest about the legalization of recreational marijuana in the state in November of 2016 and the opening of retail outlets, which is due to take effect in July of 2018. The Massachusetts Medical Society cites concerns about addiction, public safety and brain development¹.

The MetroWest Health Foundation recently reviewed 2016 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey data to understand the association between recent (past 30-day) marijuana use and mental health symptoms. This review found that mental health problems were significantly higher among youth who recently used marijuana compared with non-users (see figure below). Furthermore, higher frequency of use within the past 30 days was associated with elevated risk of students experiencing mental health issues. For example, high school students who used marijuana 10 or more times in the past 30 days were 1.5 times more likely to report seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months compared to those who used marijuana 1-2 times (26.8% vs. 17.5%).



It should be noted that the data is cross-sectional and shows associations only. It is not possible to determine if marijuana use causes mental health issues, or if mental health issues may lead to marijuana use, since marijuana use is sometimes used to relieve symptoms of anxiety and depression. There are also many other factors that contribute to adolescent mental health and wellness. However, according to the University of Washington's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute, studies have found that frequent cannabis use in teenagers predicts depression and anxiety disorder later in life, with daily users having the highest risk. In addition, younger initiation increases the risk of developing mental health disorders later.²

¹ <http://www.massmed.org/Patient-Care/Health-Topics/Marijuana/What-Are-the-Risks-of-Marijuana-Use/>

² <http://learnaboutmarijuanawa.org/factsheets/mentalhealth.htm>