

Study: Medical marijuana does not increase teen drug use

By Katherine Bindley, Huffington Post

Marijuana use among teens has been on the rise for some time—it's become more popular than smoking cigarettes in recent years—but a provocative new study shows that legalizing pot for medical purposes doesn't increase the chance that teens will abuse it or certain other drugs.

"There is anecdotal evidence that medical marijuana is finding its way into the hands of teenagers, but there's no statistical evidence that legalization increases the probability of use," Daniel I. Rees, an economics professor at the University of Colorado Denver who worked on the study, said in a written statement.

Rees and his team looked at nationally representative data from high school students from 1993 through 2009—medical marijuana was legal in 13 states during that time—and found that legalization didn't affect marijuana use at school. According to study co-author Benjamine Hansen, assistant professor of economics at the University of Oregon, the data showed the opposite: There was often an inverse relationship between legalization and marijuana use.

What's more, the researchers found no evidence that medical marijuana legalization led to an increase alcohol or cocaine use.

"This result is important given that the federal government has recently intensified its efforts to close medical marijuana dispensaries," Hansen said in the statement.

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