

Study: Pot use among high school students increasing

By Anahad O'Connor, New York Times

A federal report shows that the percentage of American high school students who smoke marijuana is slowly rising, while the use of alcohol and almost every other drug is falling.

The report raises concerns that the relaxation of restrictions on marijuana, which can now be sold legally in 20 states and the District of Columbia, has been influencing use of the drug among teenagers. Health officials are concerned by the steady increase and point to what they say is a growing body of evidence that adolescent brains, which are still developing, are susceptible to subtle changes caused by marijuana.

“The acceptance of medical marijuana in multiple states leads to the sense that if it’s used for medicinal purposes, then it can’t be harmful,” said Dr. Nora D. Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which issued the report. “This survey has shown very consistently that the greater the number of kids that perceive marijuana as risky, the less that smoke it.”

Volkow said that one way marijuana might affect cognitive function in adolescents was by disrupting the normal development of white matter through which cells in the brain communicate.

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