

5 Reasons Why Legalizing Marijuana Stinks

Have you smelled anything strange in the wind lately? In case you haven't noticed, our nation is literally going to pot. We might as well get used to the odor. Marijuana laws are changing. The drug has been decriminalized in many states, while others allow marijuana use for medicinal purposes only.

At the beginning of January, Colorado citizens were allowed to buy pot for recreational use from authorized dealers. Now tourists are lining up to visit the state for "marijuana vacations." They will no doubt bring new meaning to Colorado's official song, "Rocky Mountain High."

People from every side of the political spectrum have called for decriminalization of pot—from Pat Robertson and Sarah Palin on the right to Bill Maher and Rachael Maddow on the left. I understand their concern: Huge numbers of people are in prison today for drug possession—and the cost of caring for our inmate population is overwhelming. But why do we have to swing the pendulum to the other extreme and treat marijuana like it's a mild, over-the-counter medication?

Honest health care providers will tell you that marijuana is really bad for you. Legalizing it will only cause its negative effects to increase. If you know anyone who's smoking weed or hoping to start smoking it once it is decriminalized, please pass along these facts:

1. Marijuana is highly addictive. There's a reason marijuana is the most widely used illegal drug in the world. People can't stop using it once they start. Proponents of legalizing pot have tried to dismiss this argument. But clinical studies have proven that people who used marijuana several times a week found it almost impossible to quit. People who tried to

stop smoking it reported feeling moody, tense, anxious and unable to sleep.

2. Marijuana can ruin your future. There is a reason marijuana addicts are sometimes called potheads. The drug sucks the life out of people. Those who use it regularly are more likely to drop out of school, have accidents, quit jobs, lose interest in life and feel generally demotivated. Some studies also have linked pot to suicidal thoughts. The National Institute on Drug Abuse notes that regular marijuana use can result in a 40 percent increased risk of psychosis, and the drug also can lead to schizophrenia, depression and anxiety disorders.

3. Marijuana can ruin your kids' lives. It should come as no surprise that marijuana use among American teenagers is rising at an alarming rate—just as efforts to decriminalize it are accelerating. There has been an 80 percent increase in marijuana use among teens since 2008. Do you want your children to make good grades in school? Then you should know that one study proved that teens who smoked pot regularly lost as much as 8 points in their IQs—and they did not recover the intellectual ability when they became adults.

Parents should also filter through the hype about how marijuana is “not that dangerous.” An article published last year in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology* showed that adolescents who smoked pot were at risk of brain damage. (MEMO TO YOUTH PASTORS: Please devote some time to educating your teens about drugs in 2014.)

4. Marijuana causes serious health problems. The main ingredient in marijuana, tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, has a powerful effect on the brain. Initially it creates in the user a sense of euphoria—the infamous “high” that includes bright colors, hallucinations and even laughter. But after the high comes a wave of anxiety, fear and depression. And memory can be affected permanently.

But that's not all. Smoking pot causes a 20 to 100 percent increase in a smoker's heart rate. Some marijuana users are five times more likely to have a heart attack after they use it. Pot is not good for the lungs either. One study found that smoking one joint gives as much exposure to cancer-causing chemicals as smoking five cigarettes. (And you can't help but wonder how second-hand marijuana smoke will affect those of us who are breathing the nearby fumes.)

5. Marijuana can ruin your sex life. Proponents of legalizing marijuana push the idea that pot is an aphrodisiac. But science tells another story. Men who smoke pot regularly can experience impotence as well as infertility. And some studies have found a link between marijuana use and an aggressive form of testicular cancer in young men. Not to mention that pot causes really bad breath. Marijuana is definitely not sexy!

I should also mention that seven percent of drivers involved in accidents tested positive for THC in a recent survey. That's because smoking weed impairs motor skills and increases the risk of car crashes. So if marijuana use becomes widespread after its legalization, we need to be concerned about an increased number of drugged drivers on our roads. Welcome to America—land of the free, home of the stoned.

Please spread the word. Marijuana is called a “weed” for a reason. It's bad for kids. It's bad for adults. When I look at the crazy laws being passed in the United States today, I can't help but wonder what our leaders are smoking.

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