

## AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

### Despite relaxed regulations, marijuana harms developing brain

Most parents do not allow their child to drink alcohol illegally or smoke cigarettes. They should take the same approach with marijuana, says the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Almost half of states have laws that allow people with certain medical conditions to use marijuana. In addition, a handful of states allow anyone over age 21 to use marijuana for recreational purposes.

Even if marijuana is legal in their state, parents should keep the drug out of their children's hands and not use it in front of their children, according to the AAP.

Marijuana can harm a child's developing brain and damage the lungs. It also causes learning and memory problems. Children who use marijuana often have trouble in school and with authority figures. About one in 10 teens who uses the drug becomes addicted.

"We can't predict who that 10% will be. I don't think any parent would want their kid to become an addict," said pediatrician Seth D. Ammerman, M.D., FAAP, a member of the AAP Committee on Substance Abuse.

Parents who are considering asking their pediatrician about medical marijuana for their child should be aware that there is no scientific evidence that it works in children.

"Medical marijuana is not standardized in any way," said Dr. Ammerman. And like any medication, it can have side effects.

If parents choose to use marijuana for medical or other purposes, they should store it in childproof packaging. This includes foods and drinks that contain marijuana. If young children eat or drink these products, they can experience symptoms such as difficulty breathing or loss of consciousness.

Parents who suspect their teen might be using marijuana can watch for the following:

- changes in who their child hangs out with, poor school performance, less interest in school and hobbies;
- a change of behavior or appearance including red, glassy eyes;
- avoidance of family and spending more time alone;
- smells like marijuana; and
- pipes, papers, tubes and other drug paraphernalia.

The AAP advises parents to talk with their children about how drugs like marijuana can be harmful to their health and dangerous if used before driving. Contact your child's pediatrician for more guidance on marijuana or a referral for substance abuse treatment. For more information, visit [www.aap.org/marijuana](http://www.aap.org/marijuana).

— Trisha Koriath

