



**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY**

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TEENS USING MARIJUANA AT YOUNGER AGES

- NEW DATA SHOWS AVERAGE AGE OF FIRST USE DROPPING; WHITE HOUSE DRUG POLICY DIRECTOR WARNS OF CONSEQUENCES OF RISING TEEN MARIJUANA USE -

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Gil Kerlikowske, Director of National Drug Policy (ONDCP), today alerted parents to the heightened dangers of marijuana use that has risen sharply, with kids starting to use the drug at a younger age.

According to recently released data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), there were 2.4 million new past-year users of marijuana in 2009 and the average age of initiation – first-time use of the drug – dropped from 17.8 in 2008 to 17.0 in 2009. The survey also reported a nine percent increase (from 6.7% to 7.3%) of current users of marijuana age 12 or older between 2008 and 2009.

Marijuana use is associated with dependence, respiratory and mental illness, poor motor performance, and cognitive impairment, among other negative effects. Although using drugs at any age can lead to addiction, research shows the earlier a person begins to use drugs, the more likely they are to progress to more serious abuse and addiction – even later in life, after use has decreased, reflecting the harmful, long-lasting effects drugs can have on the developing brain. Research suggests the human brain is still maturing during the adolescent years, with significant changes continuing into the early 20s.

“Marijuana use is increasing, teens are starting to use the drug at younger ages, and attitudes about the dangers of drug use are eroding,” said Kerlikowske. “We recognize American families are facing many challenges today, but failing to adequately prevent young people from using drugs now can lead to a lifetime of devastating consequences.”

A renewed focus on drug prevention is a major component of the Obama Administration's effort to implement a public health approach to reducing drug abuse and its consequences. President Obama's FY 2011 Budget request includes an increase of more than \$203 million in prevention funding – a 13 percent increase.

Last week, Director Kerlikowske cited [three steps](#) parents can take to protect young people from illegal drug use, including talking to kids about drugs, learning to spot risk factors, and going through medicine cabinets to remove expired, un-needed, or unused prescription drugs. For more tips and parenting resources, visit: www.TheAntiDrug.com.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy seeks to foster healthy individuals and safe communities by effectively leading the Nation's effort to reduce drug use and its consequences.

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