

Marijuana-Infused Drink May Soon Hit Grocery Aisles

By Deborah Hamilton
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A pot-infused drink is the newest way to get high for residents of Washington state, where recreational marijuana use was legalized this summer.

The fizzy drink, called "Legal," is infused with 10 milligrams of liquid marijuana and comes in three flavors: cherry, lemon and pomegranate. Washington-based Mirth Provisions, creator of the drink, charges about \$10 retail and has plans to begin selling a pot-laced iced-coffee drink as well.

The soda-like product is marketed to those curious about pot but leery of smoking a joint. In fact, one marketing tagline reads, "So ridiculously relaxing that you may find yourself becoming one with your furniture."

Karl Benzio, M.D.—a psychiatrist and founder and executive director of Lighthouse Network, an addiction and mental-health counseling helpline—says marketing marijuana through fruity, colorful drinks is a dangerous experiment that has addictive implications.

"In the late 1800s, cocaine was the wonder drug that was supposed to be medicinally helpful in many medical remedies," Benzio said, "but soon after its infusion into the marketplace, cocaine addiction ran rampant, leading President Theodore Roosevelt to hire the nation's first drug czar and declare cocaine use an emergent epidemic.

"We are headed down the same path to the same destination with the legalization of marijuana and the readily available products laced with pot," he added. "Many who are proponents of the legalization of marijuana and cannabis products will say that alcohol is more addicting and might even be more toxic to our bodies. I would agree that alcohol shouldn't be legal either. But two wrongs don't make a right. We made a mistake with alcohol, making it so accessible that it's now an addiction problem for many. Cannabis legalization should not be the subject of a similar mistake but should be viewed strictly on its own demerits."

For now, the fizzy pot-infused drinks will be sold only in Washington's certified cannabis dispensaries. Recreational marijuana use became legal in Washington in July, second to Colorado, which made pot sales legal in January. Voters will consider the same issue in Alaska and Oregon this fall.

"The risks of the cannabis chemical, as well as the terrible message given to teens that cannabis products are safe and helpful, will undoubtedly become a nightmare of future calamities on individuals, marriages, families, communities and societies," Benzio said. "The minimal amount

of money made today on the sale of pot products will pale in comparison to the huge costs at all levels of our society.

"This new drink is indeed dangerous, as no one knows how much tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the principal psychoactive element in cannabis, it contains," he said. "We also don't know the potency of the cannabis in the drink. We are on a slippery slope and so close to the edge of going over the cliff. The line is quickly being re-drawn to allow more access and less oversight with no science showing a significant benefit from cannabis, let alone outweighing the significant data about its dangers and addictive potential."