

Damage Control Needed for Colorado Youth Harmed by Marijuana

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Colorado's legalization of optional (miscalled "recreational") marijuana is a dangerous experiment at young people's expense, requiring damage control measures by state and local government as soon as possible.

That's the conclusion of a Centennial Institute Policy Brief by Dr. Christian Thurstone, MD, an adolescent substance abuse specialist with Denver Health and an assistant professor at the CU Medical School.

The Big Deal: How Marijuana Endangers Young People and What Policymakers Should Do presents the medically documented facts on health and addiction risks of today's high-potency marijuana products (many with five times the THC content of a generation ago) to babies in the womb, young children, teenagers, and users up to the age of 25.

Marijuana is addictive, contrary to popular belief, Dr. Thurstone explains – and it will hook one of every six users under the age of 18. The industry knows that, he adds, and targets them as sources of a lifelong income stream. Marijuana use in the United States is highest among people under 20, according to data cited in the policy brief, and "leakage" of the product to that age group is endemic in Colorado, despite the legal age limit of 21.

Thurstone notes that since the brain isn't fully developed until about age 25, younger users are especially vulnerable to marijuana's blighting effects and addictive properties. Teenage users are on course to lose 8 points of IQ by age 38. Cognitive and mental-health impairments afflict newborns whose mother has used marijuana.

The policy brief recommends six priorities for policymakers: (1) exercise the local option to ban retail sales of marijuana in counties and municipalities, (2) improve data collection on marijuana abuse, (3) further restrict marijuana packaging and serving sizes, (4) raise the minimum age for marijuana use, (5) expand early-intervention programs, and (6) follow the Swedish example of rigorously putting children first in drug policy.

"The legality of pot is a settled question for now, but protecting our kids is very much an open question," said John Andrews, Centennial Institute director and former Senate president. "Dr.

Thurstone's damage control agenda not only lays out priorities for the legislature next year. It also offers a priority for voters this fall, in terms of the local-option ban.

"Our institute doesn't take sides in elections," Andrews stated, "but I personally welcome the opportunity for Lakewood citizens to ban retail sales under Ballot Question 2A. Eleven hundred students here at CCU, most of them under 21, don't need this poison being peddled nearby. None of the community's children need that."

Centennial Institute is a nonpartisan public policy think tank based at Colorado Christian University and established in 2009. *The Big Deal: How Marijuana Endangers Young People and What Policymakers Should Do*, Centennial Institute Policy Brief No. 2014-3, is available free of charge at www.centennialccu.org, or in print via postal mail by calling 303.963.3424.

[Read the Policy Brief](#)