

“Don’t Be a Lab Rat”: Pot-cautious campaign aimed at Colorado teens

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The Colorado government will soon have a new marijuana-cautious campaign aimed at teenagers telling them not to be a lab rat, Governor John Hickenlooper said Tuesday.

The campaign will feature built-out “large, metal cages with a hamster water bottle on the side,” said Hickenlooper, with the widely agreed upon messaging that the developing brain can be significantly harmed by marijuana.

“For my part, my largest (downside of legal marijuana is) still teenagers and young people whose brains are still maturing,” Hickenlooper said Monday in an interview with journalist Katie Couric at the Aspen Ideas Festival. “So many of the neuroscientists around are very concerned about this high-THC marijuana and what it can do to a brain that is still in the process of growing.”

“We have one program that’s going to roll out that is gonna challenge kids,” Hickenlooper continued. “A couple studies have suggested that you could potentially lose eight points of IQ permanently by smoking this high-THC marijuana when you’re a teenager. So we’re going to say, ‘Do you want to be the lab rat that becomes a test on this?’”

“So we’re working on a whole campaign about, ‘Don’t Be a Lab Rat,’ and we’re actually right now looking at building large, metal cages with a hamster water bottle on the side and putting them in front of bus stops or close to where kids intersect saying, ‘Don’t Be a Lab Rat,’ and have that be part of an integrative program to really try and get kids’ attention — it’s hard to get their attention sometimes — but really get their attention and hold it and let them see that this is not just, ‘Maybe it’s a little bit of a risk.’ This is a high-risk situation for them.”

Couric challenged the campaign’s messaging, asking about its effectiveness and noting how socially and culturally accepted marijuana already is.

“We’re not saying it’s an easy journey,” Hickenlooper said. “These are some of the reasons why almost every elected official I know in Colorado opposed legalization. That being said, kids have been getting a permissive vibe for many years. This is not an overnight thing.”

The campaign is already conducting testing with focus groups and considering how best to use social media, Hickenlooper said.