



Understanding Youth Cannabis Use in Ontario

While there are risks for using cannabis at a young age, the majority of youth who use pot don't experience negative effects or develop problematic consumption patterns.¹

We know that the most effective approaches to cannabis education are those that resonate with young people's lived realities, and that each person's experience with marijuana is unique. At the same time, understanding the 'big picture' – when, how, and why youth use pot – can help us have more productive conversations about the role that substances play in our lives.

Here is what you need to know about youth cannabis use in Ontario.



Who?



About 1 in 5 students in Grades 7-12 reported using pot in 2017.²

Youth cannabis use has been decreasing since the late 90s, and is at its lowest in 20 years.³

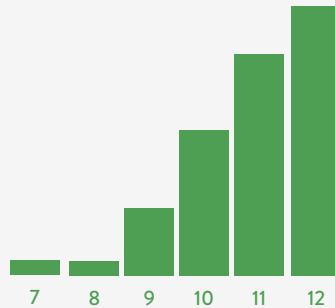
Boys and girls in Ontario are **equally likely** to use cannabis, but evidence suggests that young men generally use at a higher rate.⁴⁻⁵

1.5%

Percentage of high school students who report using **synthetic cannabis**.⁶

When?

Rates of Cannabis Use by Grade



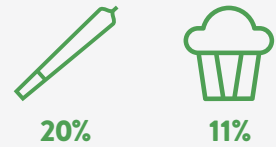
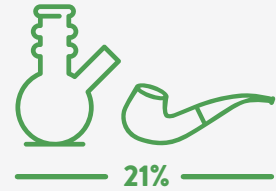
Rates of cannabis use **increase with age** – from 2% in Grades 7-8 to 37% in Grade 12.⁷

15.3

The average **age of first cannabis use** among Grade 12 students has remained stable in recent years.⁸

Evidence suggests that many youth are first offered cannabis in middle school.⁹

How?



High school students are most likely to consume pot in a **pipe or bong, joint, and food products**.¹⁰

Of students who report using cannabis, almost half have used less than 6 times in the past year.¹¹

1.4%

Percentage of Grade 7-12 students who report **daily cannabis use**. Boys and older students are much more likely to use every day.¹²

There are many reasons why young people might use pot.

Research shows that some teens use marijuana to get relief from depression, anxiety, sleeping issues, problems with concentration, and physical pain.¹³

Keep in mind that all substance use exists on a spectrum: like caffeine, prescription drugs, and alcohol, cannabis can be both beneficial and harmful.

Reasons for use, family history, and context are some of the many factors that shape young people's experiences with weed.¹⁴



6.8% of high school students in Ontario report using cannabis for medical purposes.¹⁵



So, when is use harmful or risky?¹⁶

NOTE: A young person may have one or more of these signs without having a short-term or long-term problem with cannabis. However, **the more signs, the higher the risk.**



Using regularly at an early age



Using as a major form of recreation



Daily or near daily use



Using to cope with negative moods



Using during school or work



Chronic coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing or psychotic symptoms

How to talk to youth about cannabis

Research has shown that **abstinence-based drug education is ineffective**. Fear-based programs can cause harm by providing information that is biased and at odds with young people's experiences.

The most effective approaches to drug education **reflect young people's lived realities and focus on harm reduction**.¹⁷⁻¹⁸ They empower young people to make informed decisions about their substance use.

It's important to **be curious and open-minded** when talking to youth about their cannabis use. Ask open-ended questions, and take care to be non-judgmental.

Just say 'know'! Harm reduction is more effective and empowering than fear-based approaches.

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