

Teen marijuana use on the rise

Posted: Dec 14, 2009 9:37 PM CST



MADISON (WKOW) -- Recent surveys show marijuana is becoming more popular among U.S. teenagers, and some people believe the national debate over legalizing medical marijuana may be to blame.

It's known by many names -- marijuana, cannabis, pot -- and it appears teenagers are smoking more of it.

[A study, released Monday by the University of Michigan](#), says marijuana use among 8th, 10th, 12th graders is up.

"Part of it is young people really minimize marijuana being an issue," said Shelly Dutch, director of [Connections Counseling](#). "Part of it is looking at legalization in many states."

Researchers say it's the trend that's alarming. Marijuana use among teens had dropped every year of the past decade, only to bounce back up in 2008.

It doesn't matter if students are athletes or scholars, wealthy or poor. Counselors say everyone is a potential user and abuser.

"We have many kids who are academically at a 4.0 (grade point average) that smoke marijuana. We have kids that are really struggling that smoke as well." Dutch said. "It's affecting all of our youth."

And with the Wisconsin legislature set to debate the merits of medical marijuana, drug counselors say it's more important than ever to remind teenagers about the dangers of smoking a joint.

"It's affecting their brain, and their ability to cope and function," said Dutch.

Best prevention, she says, still lies at home.

"It's really important for parents as role models to really look at their opinions and have consistent and clear messages they're giving to their son or daughter."

Dutch says counselors also seeing an alarming increase in the number of OWIs among teenagers. Not from alcohol they say, but driving under the influence of marijuana.

The state legislature is holding public hearings Tuesday at 10 a.m. at the capitol to discuss the legalization of medical marijuana in Wisconsin.

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