

Marijuana use, attitudes, and health effects in Oregon

Since we last wrote about marijuana in July 2014, the social, political, and regulatory environment pertaining to marijuana has changed significantly. As every Oregonian certainly knows by now, in addition to medical marijuana, non-medical retail sale of marijuana is now legal in Oregon. In this new environment, the Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division has some specific roles:

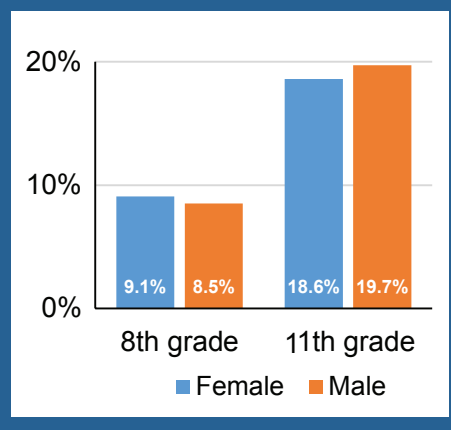
1. To protect the public's health by:
 - Understanding and minimizing the public health impacts of retail marijuana use
2. To educate the public about health issues related to marijuana use
 - Protecting children and vulnerable populations from marijuana exposure
 - Preventing youth marijuana use, and
 - Monitoring marijuana use, attitudes, and health effects in Oregon
3. To regulate medical marijuana and dispensaries
4. To accredit laboratories that test *Cannabis* in Oregon

This *CD Summary* focuses on objective #1 and presents data on Oregon adult and youth marijuana use patterns, our attitudes towards marijuana, and some of the observed health and social impacts. Data sources and links to resources for clinicians in talking to their patients about marijuana are listed on the last page.

Marijuana use among Oregonians*

Many young people and adults in Oregon currently use marijuana. In 2015, 9% of eighth-graders and 19% of 11th-graders reported current marijuana use (figure 1), comparable to national use patterns. More youth currently use marijuana than smoke cigarettes. Recent trends in youth use have been stable.

Figure 1. Current marijuana use among Oregon youth, by grade and gender, 2015



*For both youth and adults "current use" is as using marijuana one or more of the past 30 days.

Among Oregon adults, approximately half (48%) report they have ever used marijuana, and one in 10 (11%) report they currently use marijuana. Marijuana use is higher in Oregon than nationally, and higher among adults aged 18–25 years than older adults (≥26 years) (figure 2). Current use is higher among men (14%) than women (8%). Adults from the Central Oregon region (Deschutes, Jefferson, and Crook counties) reported lower current marijuana use (2%), but rates among adults from each of the five other regions were comparable (9%–12%). Compared to all Oregon adults (11% current use), selected populations reported higher current use of marijuana, including: lesbian/gay/bisexual (30%), people experiencing poverty (16%), and people with disabilities (14%); military veterans reported lower use (6%).

Although marijuana can be used in a variety of ways (e.g., eating marijuana in food and “vaping” in electronic vaporizers), smoking is the most common method (approximately 90%); 27% of current users reported consuming edibles, and 14% reported “vaping”.

Many Oregon adults use marijuana for medical purposes. Annual numbers of Oregon medical marijuana patients have increased during the last 15 years (figure 3). As of January 1, 2016, 77,620 medical marijuana patients were registered in Oregon. The primary indication for use is severe pain (93%). Three percent of adults report current medical marijuana use, making up less than one-third of total adult marijuana use.

Knowledge and attitudes

Data reveal gaps in public knowledge of marijuana-related health risks and the law, at the same time that many adults report seeing marijuana marketing in communities. Approximately half (51%) of Oregon adults had seen marijuana product or store advertising in their community in the past month; less than one-third (29%) had seen information about health risks of using marijuana. In addition, more than half of adults (61%) knew that age ≥21 years is the legal age to use marijuana in Oregon, and more than half (59%) knew that it is still illegal to use marijuana in public spaces. However, nearly two-thirds (63%) said they didn’t know when it is legal to drive after using marijuana.

A panel survey of Oregon adults showed: three in four (75%) reported being bothered by adults using marijuana in front of children, and more than half (56%) reported being

Figure 2. Current marijuana use among Oregon and U.S. adults by age and group, 2006–2015

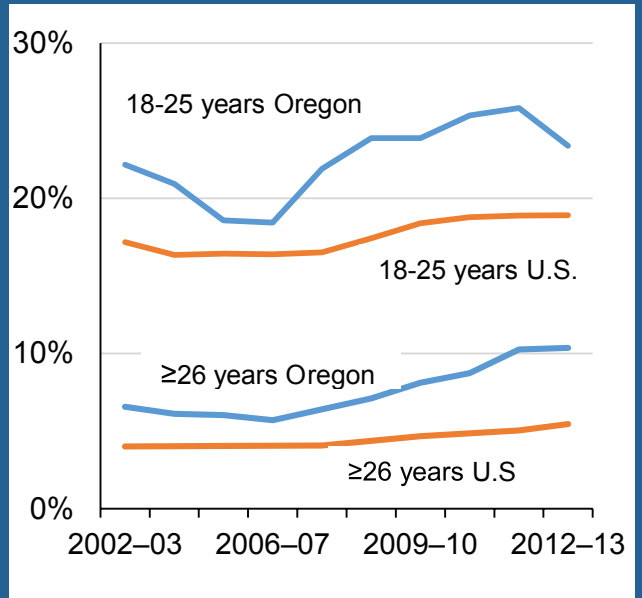
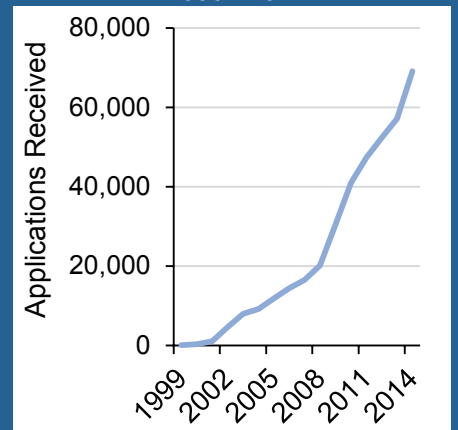


Figure 3. Annual numbers of Oregon medical marijuana card patient applications, 1999–2014

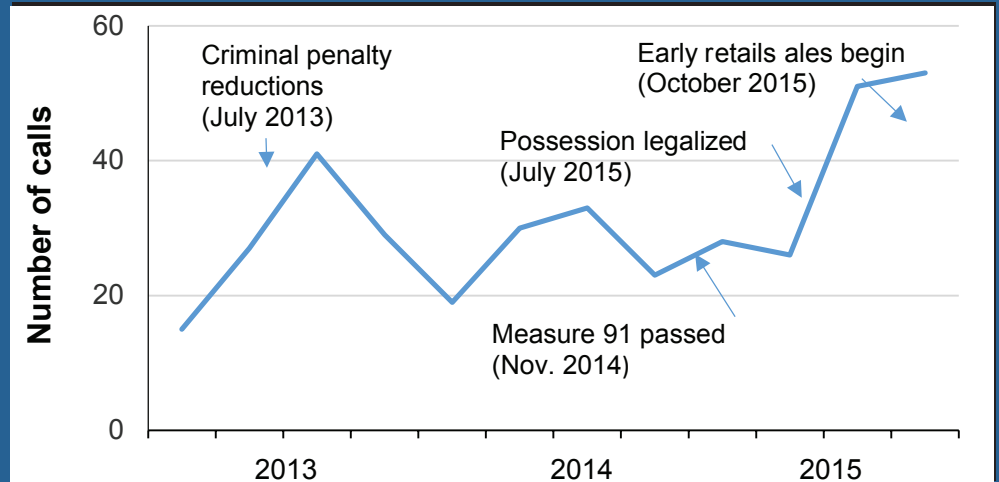


bothered by people using marijuana in public; with younger adults being “less bothered” by these than older adults.

Three in four (75%) adults knew that driving under the influence of marijuana increases the risk of a traffic crash, and half (54%) knew that users that start young face greater health risks.

Data suggest that youth prevention efforts may be needed: 62% of 11th-graders report they have easy access to marijuana, and youth report that marijuana is easier to get than cigarettes. In addition, nearly half of 11th-graders currently using marijuana that drive a car report that they drove within three hours of using marijuana in the past month.

Figure 4. Marijuana-related calls to the Oregon Poison Center, 2013–2015

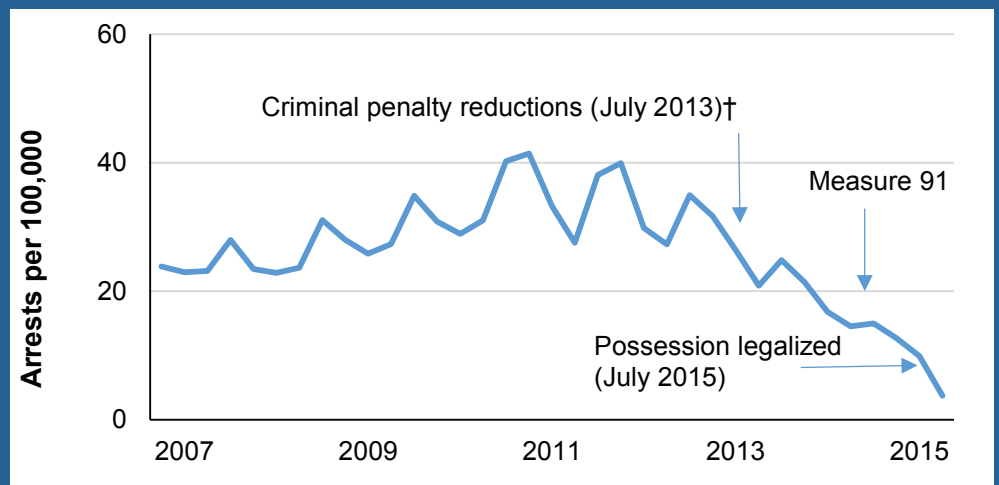


Public health and social consequences

The Public Health Division is establishing a system to monitor a variety of health and social effects of marijuana use in Oregon, but two specific public health impacts have already been observed after legalization of retail sales:

- Marijuana-related calls to the Oregon Poison Center were stable from 2013 through mid-2015 and increased in the second half of 2015 (figure 4). From 2013–2015, calls for persons <13 years of age increased.
- Marijuana-related arrests decreased dramatically from 2012– 2015 (figure 5).

Figure 5. Marijuana arrest rates among Oregon adults, 2007–2015



† Reduction in penalties for >1 ounce of marijuana possession and marijuana manufacturing.

What clinicians can do

Talk to parents and patients about marijuana use as part of overall preventive care and screening. The Oregon Health Authority's [scientific advisory committee](#) reviewed current data to make evidence-based recommendations to minimize negative health effects of marijuana use. While gaps exist in knowledge about the physical and mental health effects of marijuana, but we know that marijuana may be harmful to some people, especially babies and children. To be precautionary, we recommend patients be advised: there is no safe level of marijuana use during pregnancy; and THC can pass to a fetus or baby during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Furthermore, marijuana can make children very sick. Parents who use marijuana should keep it locked, out of sight, and out of reach of children. Alert patients that this symbol will be used on the label of retail and medical marijuana products sold in Oregon. Resources for accidental ingestion of marijuana include the [Poison Center Hotline](#) at 1-800-222-1222 or 911 if the symptoms include trouble breathing, walking or sitting up.



Data Sources:

Youth:

- [Oregon Healthy Teens | Oregon Student Wellness Survey | Monitoring the Future](#)

Adult:

- [Oregon Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System \(BRFSS\)](#)
- [Oregon Public Health Division, Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Section, on-line survey of 2,000 Oregon adults \(conducted Nov 2015\)](#)
- [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#)

Resources:

- [Marijuana and your health](#): The OHA Public Health Division website has information about the medical marijuana program; retail marijuana for patients and providers.
- [Marijuana use, attitudes and health effects \(pdf\)](#): An Oregon report
- [Children and marijuana don't mix \(pdf\)](#): A brochure for parents
- [Public Health's Approach to Youth Marijuana Prevention \(pdf\)](#): HB 3400 Report