

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Dr. Sharon Harris

516- 676-2008

safeglencove@yahoo.com

SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Recreational Cannabis Use By Teens Linked to Risk of Depression and Suicidality

Researchers at Columbia University recently published a study showing that teens who use cannabis recreationally are two to four times as likely to develop psychiatric disorders, such as depression and suicidality, than teens who don't use cannabis at all. The researchers also found that casual cannabis use puts teens at risk for problem behaviors, including poor grades, truancy, and trouble with the law, which can have long-term negative consequences that may keep youth from developing their full potential in adulthood.

Perceptions exist among youth, parents, and educators that casual cannabis use is benign. This is alarming as cannabis use had such strong associations to adverse mental health and life outcomes for teens who did not meet the criteria for having a substance use condition. The Columbia study is the first to identify that subclinical, or nondisordered, cannabis use—symptoms and behavior that do not meet the criteria for clinical disorder—has clear adverse and impairing associations for adolescents.

To conduct their research, Dr. Sultan and colleagues analyzed responses from a representative sample of respondents to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health which collects data on tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, and mental health annually. The cross-sectional study included approximately 70,000 adolescents between the ages of 12-17. The researchers found that more than 2.5 million U.S. teens—or about 1 in 10—were casual cannabis users. More than 600,000 teens—roughly 1 in 40—met the criteria for cannabis addiction. To be considered to have cannabis use disorder, an individual must meet at least two of 11 criteria, which include an inability to reduce consumption, constant cravings, and relationship and social problems. Additionally, nondisordered cannabis users were 2-2.5 times more likely to have adverse mental health outcomes and behavioral problems, compared to teens who didn't use cannabis at all. Teens with an addiction to cannabis were 3.5 to 4.5 times more likely to have these issues.

Numerous studies note that cannabis use can alter the development of the cerebral cortex, the brain's center of reasoning and executive function, posing a risk to young people whose brains have not matured. Marijuana use in adolescence is associated with difficulty thinking, problem-solving, and reduced memory, as well as a risk of long-term addiction.

Exposing developing brains to dependency forming substances appears to prime the brain for being more susceptible to developing other forms of addiction later in life given the fact that mental health problems and cannabis use are closely linked. Having depression or suicidality may drive teens to use cannabis as way to relieve their suffering. Concurrently, using cannabis likely worsens depressive and suicidal symptoms.

The researchers maintain the findings are particularly concerning given the popularity of cannabis as states have moved to make the drug legal. As of April 2023, 22 states have legalized recreational marijuana. 38 states allow the use of medical marijuana. This raises questions if the criteria used for establishing a diagnosis of a substance use disorder need to be re-evaluated for youth. While teenage cannabis use is illegal, even in states with legalized cannabis, there are little to no true protections for teens, such as educational campaigns that if used as an early prevention intervention method, has proven to delay age of onset. Therefore, Federal legalization offers the opportunity to address those safeguards.

The researchers are continuing this work by evaluating if adolescents' casual use of nicotine and alcohol by adolescents also demonstrate adverse and impairing effects on brain function, mental health, and long-term addiction.

SAFE is the only alcohol and substance use prevention agency in Glen Cove. Its Coalition is concerned about cannabis use- especially in youth as their brains are developing. The Coalition is conducting a prevention awareness campaign entitled "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE; Underage Marijuana Use," to educate and update the community regarding marijuana use and its negative consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about Cannabis/Marijuana use at www.safeglencove.org.