

Adolescents in substance abuse programs report using other's med marijuana

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A recent study by University of Colorado School of Medicine researchers shows that it is very common for adolescents in substance abuse treatment to use medical marijuana recommended to someone else (also known as "diverted" medical marijuana).

Stacy Salomonsen-Sautel, PhD, a postdoctoral fellow in the CU School of Medicine's Department of Pharmacology and her colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry looked at two [adolescent substance abuse](#) treatment programs in the Denver metropolitan area. The [study participants](#) were asked questions about their medical marijuana use. Out of 164 adolescents in the study, 121 or 73.8 percent reported using medical marijuana that had been recommended for someone else and they reported using medical marijuana a median of 50 times.

The study shows [adolescent patients](#) who used medical marijuana began using marijuana on a regular basis at a younger age compared with adolescent patients who did not use medical marijuana. The study also shows that adolescents who used medical marijuana had more [marijuana abuse](#)/dependence and conduct disorder symptoms than adolescents who did not use medical marijuana. Additionally, most of the adolescent patients rated [smoking marijuana](#) as having slight or no risk of harm to themselves.

Lead author Salomonsen-Sautel said "Many high-risk adolescent patients in [substance abuse treatment](#) have used diverted medical marijuana on multiple occasions, which implies that substantial diversion is occurring

from registered users. Our results support the need for policy changes that protect against diversion of medical marijuana to adolescents."

Recent state and federal policy changes have allowed for more widespread legalized medical marijuana use in Colorado. At the time of the study, only 41 adolescents in the state held valid registry identification cards for medical marijuana. This suggests adolescents using medical marijuana are more likely to get it from adult registered users than from peers.

The study also calls into question the adequacy of the safeguards meant to prevent medical marijuana use by individuals to whom it was not recommended, adolescents in particular. As the study authors note, medical marijuana in Colorado is not handled like other medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Once approved for [medical marijuana](#) usage, individuals can purchase different amounts or even grow a personal supply.

More information: The article "Medical Marijuana Use Among Adolescents in Substance Abuse Treatment" by Stacy Salomonsen-Sautel, Joseph T. Sakai, Christian Thurstone, Robin Corley, Christian Hopfer, appears in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 51, Issue 7 (July 2012)

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