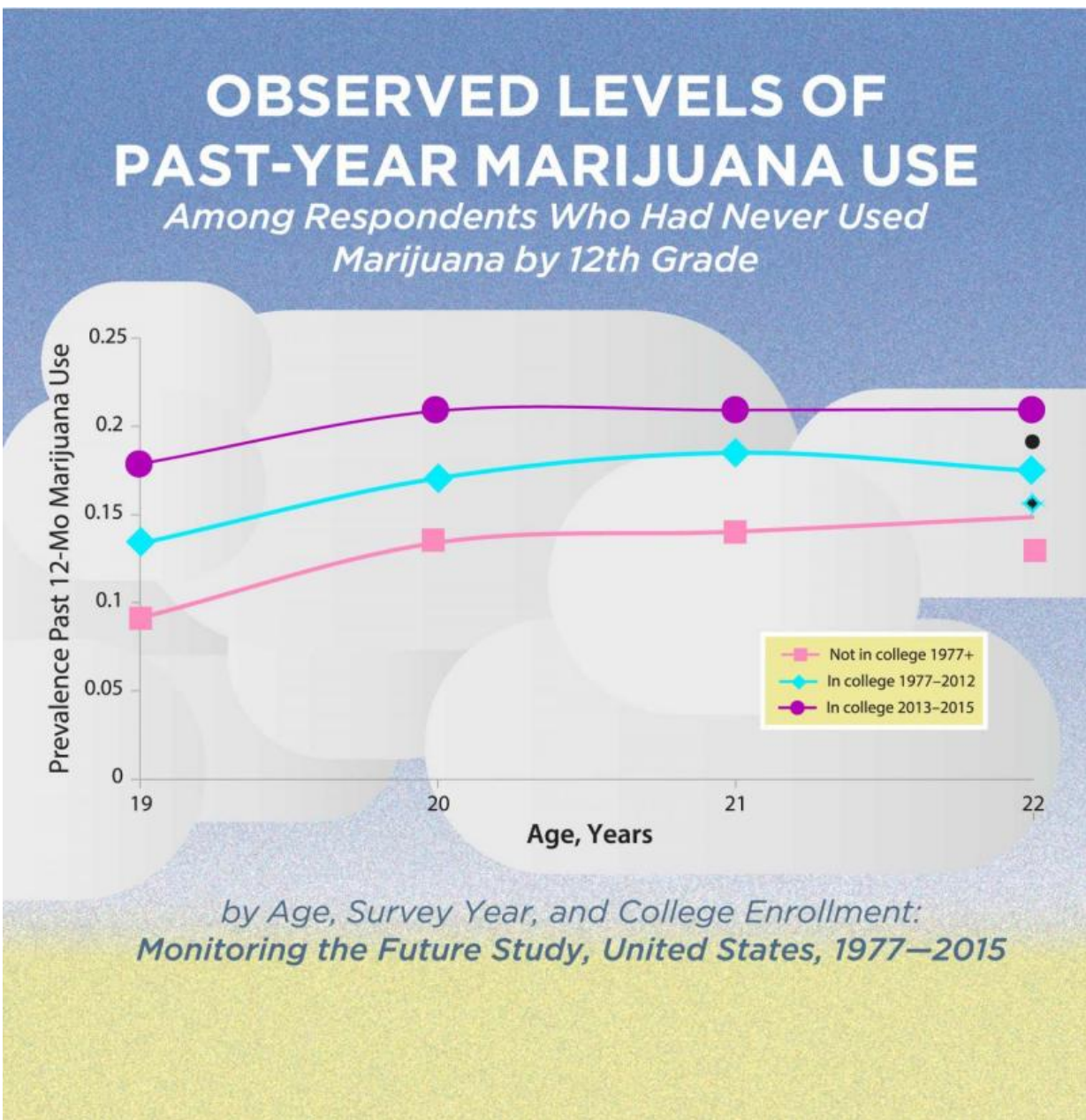


# First-time marijuana use in college at highest level in three decades

April 21 2017, by Morgan Sherburne



Credit: University of Michigan

Levels of first-time marijuana use in college have increased sharply in the past three years to the highest levels recorded in the past three decades. In 2015, about one in five college students became a first-time marijuana user.

These results come from the annual Monitoring the Future study, which has been tracking substance use among young adults for the past 36 years. It is conducted by a team of researchers at the University of Michigan and is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Results are based on young adults ages 19-22.

Increasing levels of first-time [marijuana](#) use among [young adults](#) have been concentrated among [college students](#), and no increases have been seen among their age peers not in college. As a consequence, levels of first-time marijuana use have become increasingly higher for college students as compared to their peers not in college: by about 51 percent in 2015, which compares to 41 percent in 2014, 31 percent in 2013 and 20 percent from 1977 to 2012.

"There has been a sea change in attitudes toward marijuana use," said Richard Miech, the lead author of the study.

He points out that the majority of adults today now support legalization of recreational marijuana use. He speculates that college students are well positioned to turn changing marijuana attitudes into actual use, for a number of reasons.

College students are less likely than older adults and noncollege students

to have entered the social roles of spouse, parent and employee, all of which reduce marijuana use, Miech says. Many factors unique to [college](#) also promote substance use, such as lack of parental supervision, plenty of free time and a party culture, he adds.

"College students were at the vanguard of marijuana use in the 1960s and it seems they are in position to usher in new increases in population marijuana use today," Miech said.

The study appears in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

**More information:** Richard A. Miech et al. The Influence of College Attendance on Risk for Marijuana Initiation in the United States: 1977 to 2015, *American Journal of Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2017.303745](#)

Provided by University of Michigan

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