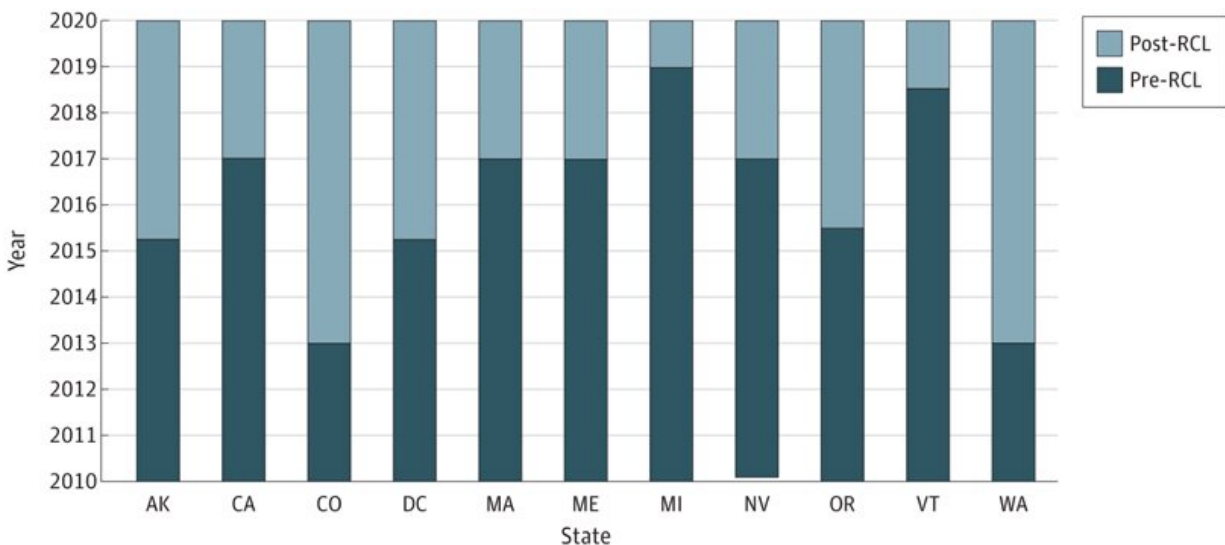


Legalizing marijuana in US states may lead to increases in alcohol consumption

November 21 2022, by Bob Yirka



Timing of Recreational Cannabis Laws (RCLs) by Year-Quarter Among Implementing States, 2010 to 2019 States were coded as implementing an RCL in a quarter-year when it was implemented by the end of the first month of that quarter. For example, a state that implemented an RCL by January 31, 2017, was counted as implementing it in the first quarter of 2017. Implementation refers to the date on which the law went into effect, not the date on which it was passed. Credit: *JAMA Health Forum* (2022). DOI: 10.1001/jamahealthforum.2022.4069

A trio of researchers, two with the University of Pittsburgh, the other with William Patterson University, has found evidence showing that alcohol consumption rises among young people in the United States

when marijuana use is legalized. In their paper published in *JAMA Health Forum*, Vandana Macha, Coleman Drake and Rahi Abouk, describe studying data in the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System database.

Over the past decade, 20 states in the U.S. have reversed laws banning the recreational use of marijuana. Such reversals partly came about as proponents argued that making marijuana legal would reduce the amount of alcohol people consume across the country.

Recreational use of alcohol has been shown to be more problematic than use of marijuana—alcohol has more [negative health effects](#), for example, and it also leads to more [undesirable behaviors](#), such as engaging in a wide variety of crimes, including driving while intoxicated. But these arguments may have been flawed, as the researchers with this new effort have conducted the largest-ever assessment of the impact on [alcohol consumption](#) following legalization of marijuana and have drawn the opposite conclusion.

The researchers analyzed surveys taken by people of all ages for the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System—a project run by the U.S. CDC as a means to learn more about the risks people take. In all, the researchers looked at data for 4 million people who reported on their use of alcohol and/or marijuana both before and after marijuana was legalized in the state where they were living.

The researchers found an average uptick in alcohol use of 0.9% in states in the year following legalization of recreational [marijuana use](#). They note that despite the increase, they did not see any increase in heavy or binge drinking. They also noted that the increase was only found in [young people](#) between the ages of 18 and 24, and was more prevalent in white males who did not attend college.

The researchers note that their findings agree with results found by other teams that found sales figures of alcoholic beverages rise slightly in states after legalization of marijuana.

More information: Vandana Macha et al, Association of Recreational Cannabis Legalization With Alcohol Use Among Adults in the US, 2010 to 2019, *JAMA Health Forum* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jamahealthforum.2022.4069](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2022.4069)

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Citation: Legalizing marijuana in US states may lead to increases in alcohol consumption (2022, November 21) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-11-legalizing-marijuana-states-alcohol-consumption.html>

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