

# Young workers' injuries rise after recreational marijuana sales made legal

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After states legalize the sale of weed for recreational use, on-the-job

injuries rise among younger workers, new research shows.

U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics for 2006 through 2020 show that legal "recreational marijuana sales were associated with a 10% increase in [workplace injuries](#) among individuals aged 20 to 34 years," the study authors concluded.

They note that prior research involving [older workers](#) did not show this effect. In fact, older workers' injury rates typically decline after recreational weed is made legal in their state, perhaps because older folk are only using their marijuana to ease pain.

In contrast, the rise in [injury](#) among [younger workers](#) may be because "[marijuana use](#) diminishes workers' cognitive functioning or acts as a gateway to harder drugs," the researchers theorized.

The study was [published](#) in *JAMA Health Forum* and co-led by Dr. Joseph Sabia, chair of the economics department at San Diego State University.

As the researchers noted, "since 2012, 24 states and Washington, D.C., have legalized the possession and sale of small quantities of marijuana for recreational purposes."

Would such moves encourage young workers to get high on the job, putting their performance at risk?

To find out, Sabia's group used Bureau of Labor statistics to track changes in the rate of workplace injuries among young employees before and after laws allowing recreational marijuana sales were adopted in their state.

"Two and 3 years post-adoption, injuries were significantly higher," the

research team concluded.

Among 20-to-34-year-olds generally, on-the-job injuries rose by 10% on average, and when the data focused on folks solely engaged in full-time work, the researchers observed an 11.9% rise.

Sabia's group believe that a loosening of laws around recreational marijuana may hurt younger workers, specifically. That's "consistent with the hypothesis that recreational marijuana impedes [their] cognitive function and care," the researchers said.

**More information:** Ling Li et al, Recreational Marijuana Legalization and Workplace Injuries Among Younger Workers, *JAMA Health Forum* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamahealthforum.2023.5438](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2023.5438)

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