

Colorado's five-year experiment in legalizing recreational marijuana has left heartache in its wake. The additional 0.9 percent contribution to the state's annual budget should be balanced against these costs:

- While DUI overall fell from 2015 through 2017, the percentage of state patrol citations mentioning marijuana rose.¹
- The number of fatal crashes where the driver tested positive for marijuana rose 153 percent, from 55 in 2013 to 139 in 2017. Traffic deaths from all causes rose 35 percent during the same period.^{1 2}
- Marijuana-related traffic deaths now make up 21 percent of all fatalities, compared to the 26 percent attributed to drunken driving.²
- More than two-thirds of self-identified marijuana users surveyed by the Colorado Department of Transportation said they drove after using marijuana in the past year, and more than one in four said they do so almost daily. Forty percent of recreational users and 34 percent of medical users said they don't believe being under the influence of pot affects their ability to drive.³
- Legalization did not eliminate the black market. Court case filings for conspiracy, manufacturing, distribution and possession with intent to sell initially fell, but rebounded and increased from 2015 to 2017. There were nearly four times as many organized-crime cases – the cartels – in 2017 compared to 2012.¹
- The number of plants seized on public lands increased: 80,926 plants were seized in 2017, up 73 percent from 46,662 in 2012.¹
- Youth marijuana use increased 5 percent in the three years after legalization, compared to the three years before. It is 54 percent higher than the national average. College-age use increased 18 percent and is 60 percent higher than the national average. Studies have shown marijuana adversely affects a young mind's ability to absorb and retain information.⁴
- The yearly rate of emergency department visits related to marijuana increased 52 percent after legalization. Hospitalizations increased 148 percent.²
- Marijuana-related calls to the Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center rose to 223 in 2017, compared to 127 in 2013 and 44 in 2009 (the year before medical marijuana became widely available). More than half of the cases involved children under 18.⁵

- Marijuana was found in one-fifth of the 10- to 19-year-olds who committed suicide from 2013 to 2017, far outdistancing any other substance.²

As of June 2017, Colorado had nearly 500 retail marijuana stores, outnumbering Starbucks (392) and McDonald's (208).²

Sources:

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