

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: October 13, 2025

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New Study Finds Daily Cannabis Use Rising Among California Teens Post-Legalization

Experts call for stronger public health guardrails to protect youth from more frequent, problem use, high-potency products, and aggressive marketing

CA — A new [peer-reviewed study](#) in the Journal of Adolescent Health, co-authored by researchers from UC Irvine, UCLA, and the Public Health Institute's (PHI) Getting it Right from the Start (GIRFTS), finds that frequent cannabis use among California 11th graders rose sharply after the adult-use cannabis retailers began opening in 2018. While any past 30-day use leveled out, daily or near-daily use continued to increase, reversing a prior downward trend. The study shows more teens are using more frequently and more intensely—raising serious health risks for California youth.

“This study shows that legalization has changed not just whether teens use cannabis, but how they use it,” **said Bethany Simard, Research Scientist at PHI’s GIRFTS and the study's lead author.** “We’re seeing more young people using more often — exactly the pattern linked to dependence and long-term health risks.”

The research, drawing on survey data from more than 370,000 California teens, highlights how local and state policies are shaping youth use.

Key Findings

- Frequent cannabis use increased after legalization. Before 2018, daily or near-daily cannabis use was declining among California 11th graders. After legalization, that trend reversed, climbing steadily through 2020.
- Local retail access matters. Jurisdictions that banned retail cannabis sales consistently saw lower rates of youth use both before and after legalization. In contrast, rates stayed higher in places that newly permitted storefront sales, while medical-delivery-only jurisdictions did not see increases.

Adolescent frequent cannabis use is linked to impaired memory, and greater risk of developing cannabis use disorder and psychosis. The study underscores the need for public health guardrails to counter industry-driven normalization and protect youth.

Frequent use has risen alongside increases in cannabis potency—from stronger flower to highly concentrated products like vapes, shatter for dabbing, and wax—which carry a greater risk of dependency and of adverse mental health effects, including psychosis.

Getting it Right from the Start urges policymakers to act by

- Strengthening delivery regulations to prevent easy underage access.
- Using existing local and state government authority to adopt policies that reduce youth exposure and limit access to more harmful products.
- Restricting high-potency products like concentrates, dabs, and infused pre-rolls.
- Curbing products, advertising and marketing that appeal to youth.
- Restoring recently cut tax revenues that fund youth substance abuse prevention programs.

“We can’t treat cannabis like any other consumer product,” **said Dr. Alisa Padon, Research Director at PHI’s GIRFTS and a co-author on the paper.** “Without strong local laws on access and limits on advertising and products that appeal to youth, we risk fueling a new wave of youth problem use that could have been prevented.”

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About Getting it Right from the Start

Getting it Right from the Start is a project of the Public Health Institute that provides research, policy analysis, and technical assistance to communities seeking to protect youth, advance health equity, and apply lessons from tobacco and alcohol control to cannabis policy.