



# Maine Source

Mission: A collaborative community effort to increase overall community capacity for advocacy, education, guidance, and resources for families to promote drug and alcohol-free youth

Summer 09 Issue

## MCYAF launches new & improved web site!

MCYAF is pleased to announce the launch of a new and improved web site at [www.mcyaf.com](http://www.mcyaf.com).

On the site you will find: a special section for Parents featuring tips and up-to-date facts about alcohol and other drugs, plus local, state and national resources for prevention and treatment; a great new Teens section with links to web sites specifically for young people, an alcohol Q & A, and how to help a friend or family member.

In addition, the new web site can put you in touch with MCYAF's *MaineSource* newsletters, links to many other helpful web sites and information, and an opportunity to sign up for the latest MCYAF news or join our community efforts.

Check out [www.mcyaf.com](http://www.mcyaf.com), tell us what you think about it and what other information you'd find useful.

## Medical marijuana? Side effects not what the doctor ordered

Legalizing marijuana for medical use comes up periodically, but unfortunately, the issue is not nearly as simple as some people think. This spring, MCYAF Director Margaret Polovchak sent a letter to Illinois legislators on behalf of the MCYAF Board of Directors and community partners regarding the Compassionate Use of Medical Cannabis Pilot Program Act (SB 1281 & HB 2514) and the serious danger it poses to the health of teens.

**Youth who use marijuana before the age of 15 are nearly five times more likely to develop serious mental illness by their late twenties, compared with those who start at 18.**

"While we understand the intent of the legislation and are empathetic to the terminally ill and their rights, please be aware that the pro-marijuana legalization movement is disguising its efforts by parading the terminally ill before you in order to appeal to your compassion and pass this legislation," Polovchak wrote. She told the legislators that MCYAF members are gravely concerned about the Act for a number of reasons.

One of the most important is that almost **20 percent of high school teens in our community use marijuana regularly**. This exceeds national marijuana use rates. In 2005/2006, the

three states with the highest rates of youth marijuana use were medical marijuana states: Maine, Montana and Vermont.

Another is that **the brains of teenagers appear to be particularly susceptible to the drug**. Polovchak cited a recent study in New Zealand that found youth who start to use marijuana before the age of 15 are nearly five times more likely to develop serious mental illness by their late twenties, compared with those who start at 18. Drug use is thought to influence the final phase of brain formation, increasing the risk of functional and chemical imbalances associated with conditions such as schizophrenia.

A third important reason is that **legalizing marijuana for medical purposes has created a law enforcement nightmare in other states**. In California, Polovchak noted, more teens are entering treatment for marijuana addiction than ever before, and there is now a black market for medicinal use registration cards.

Law enforcement has had to step up its efforts (and costs) because of large increases in drug trafficking. Polovchak says, "Illinois cannot meet its current substance abuse treatment needs. Our State budget would be compromised further if funds are needed for additional services and law enforcement as a result of abuse/addictions brought about by increased access to marijuana." -continued on page 2-

### FAST FACT: During which months do more teens try marijuana for the first time?

- A. January and February
- B. April and May
- C. June and July
- D. September and October

*The answer is C – June and July.* There is a 40% increase in the number of youth who try marijuana for the first time during these two months compared to the rest of the year. Each day in June and July, an average of 6300 youth tries marijuana for the first time. Likely reasons are: 1. Boredom. Many kids say they started smoking marijuana because they were bored. 2. Friends who use drugs. Children are more likely to experiment with drugs if their friends do. During summer, kids have more free time to hang out with friends and make new ones. 3. Too much unsupervised time. Having lots of time without adult supervision puts kids at risk for drug use.

Member of:



Source: *The Best of IDEA, Summer 2008. SAMHSA Tips for Parents: The Truth About Marijuana, last referenced 5/5/2005. NIDA, September 2004 (revised) Marijuana: Facts for Teens, NIH Publication No. 03-4037, last referenced 5/5/2005.*

**Medical marijuana?** (continued from pg. 1)

Bottom line: According to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), **today's marijuana is 20 times stronger than that of the 60's and 70's.** Marijuana is an addictive, toxic drug, a fact that is well-substantiated by research. It is not safe or harmless. The fact that it is illegal and not readily available in retail outlets

serves as a deterrent for some in deciding whether or not to use it.

Some of our state legislators are undecided on this issue. Please call them today about this very important legislation. Visit [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org) for their contact information.

**Help teens stay safe this summer**

This month's "Who Knew" column (below) reminds parents of a fact that will come in handy this summer: Parents are the leading reason teens choose to say no to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. That's important because summer offers teens lots of chances to expand their experiences for good or ill. *TheAntiDrug.com* offers sound advice from Stephen Wallace, Chairman of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) and author of the book *Reality Gap: Alcohol, Drugs and Sex — What Parents Don't Know and Teens Aren't Telling*. Wallace says:

- Our research clearly shows that parents who take the time to talk with their kids, establish rules, and follow through with punishments when necessary are more likely to influence their children's choices.
- Before letting a teen camp out with friends, ask yourself if your teen has been in any trouble before, if she talks with you openly and honestly about decision-making and personal behavior, and if she will agree to a set of rules about drug and alcohol use and stick to them. We hear from kids that unsupervised sleepovers are often fertile ground for misbehavior. Of course, there may be other safety issues as well, depending on the location of the campout and proximity of adults who can help if there is a problem.

- When it comes to teens posting summer party pictures on cell phones and websites such as Facebook and MySpace, remind your teens that colleges and prospective employers often look for such photos and their decisions are affected by them. Remind your teens that if they are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, their impaired judgment makes them especially vulnerable to risky situations and foolish decisions about posting the evidence. It sounds obvious, but remind your teens that you strongly expect them *not* to post inappropriate images of themselves or anyone else.
- When your kids are home alone, lock your liquor cabinet, safeguard prescription drugs and monitor quantities, and be aware how easy it is for teens to get alcohol from others. According to Teens Today research from SADD, 72 percent of teens say it is easy for them to purchase or obtain alcohol (compared to only 50 percent of parents who think that is the case). Similarly, 81 percent of teens say they can easily find opportunities to drink.

Wallace says that research also shows parents who adopt a "zero-tolerance" approach to underage drinking are more likely to have kids who don't drink. The SADD Contract for Life is available for free at [www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org). For more help in keeping teens safe this summer, visit [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com). MCYAF wishes your teens a summer of wonderful memories!



You may be surprised to know that according to our students' anonymous survey responses, **parents are the #1 reason that teens decide not to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.** Teenagers are more likely to experiment in risky behaviors such as drinking alcohol, smoking, or using drugs when left unsupervised, and with most parents working, summer presents a lot of challenges in this area. Help your teen make summer plans that include supervised "down time." Summer also provides a great opportunity for teens to earn some money and establish a good work record with a summer job, learn

something fun and new (or get a tough class out of the way) in summer school, play a sport, volunteer or do community service work that will introduce them to new people and new areas of interest.

**Whatever your teens do this summer, make it a priority to know where your teens are, who they are with, and what they are doing.** To help keep them safe, check in on them during the day, enforce a curfew at night, set clear "no use" rules with established consequences -- and enforce them. Teenagers need guidelines and structure to help them make good decisions and – Who Knew? – they don't really mind so much getting guidelines and that structure from you.

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