



# SMOKING AND VAPING IN THE AMERICAS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION

May, 2021.

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21st Century, two new products with great appeal to young people became legally available in the United States. The first was electronic cigarettes, with nicotine extracted from tobacco. The second was cannabis (marijuana) which, although already consumed by a sizeable portion of the population, has been legalized for recreational use in 16 states and Washington D.C., and legalized for medical use in 36 states<sup>1</sup> and it started to be commercialized in specialized stores.

The fact that these two products are not legally available in the vast majority of Latin American countries indicates the importance of reflecting on the need to include this topic in youth training activities and to share knowledge about them with families, teachers and other adults who are a reference in the lives of adolescents in the Latin community in the USA.

## ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (e-cigs)

Studies have shown that smoking causes more than 400,000 deaths per year in the United States (USA) from cancers and cardiovascular diseases. Nicotine is the substance responsible for making people addicted to cigarettes. In order to help people stop smoking conventional cigarettes and thus avoid early death, electronic cigarettes were developed as a way to deliver high doses of nicotine but without the cigarettes' cancer-causing agents and chemicals that are harmful to our vascular and cardiac systems.

Unfortunately, the lack of regulation of electronic cigarettes in the USA and the commercial greed of e-cigarette companies has resulted in an epidemic of electronic cigarette use among adolescents, pre-adolescents and young adults who had never smoked conventional cigarettes. The 'e-cigs', as they are called in English, and particularly those of the JUUL brand, the most popular brand among teens, come with flavors like strawberry, vanilla, mint and pineapple.

## References

- [1 Business Insider - Marijuana Legalization](#)
- [2 E-cigarettes and Youth \(CDC\)](#)
- [3 Beyond joints and brownies: Marijuana concentrates in the legal landscape of WA State](#)
- [4 Exposure to Advertisements and Marijuana Use Among US Adolescents \(CDC\)](#)

They have a modern design and are promoted on social media via influencers. The "water vapor" appearance of e-cigarettes hides numerous chemicals in their cartridges that are harmful to health.

Even though its sale is prohibited to individuals under 21 years old, e-cigs are widely used among young people. In 2020, 3.6 million young people in the USA used e-cigs, including 1 in 5 high school students and 1 in 20 students in the 6th to 8th grades.<sup>2</sup>

## CANNABIS

Cannabis (also known as marijuana) is a plant that has been used for millennia for its medicinal and mind-altering properties. In the USA, although illegal at the federal level, cannabis is legalized in several US states. This is possible because the federalist system adopted in the USA allows great autonomy for the states.

The current state model of cannabis legalization allows its commercialization, for profit, to consumers 21 years old or older. Commercial exploitation has had at least two important implications in the states where it has been legalized: aggressive advertising and marketing of cannabis products and intense competition between cannabis processors to produce stronger, more concentrated products with greater intoxicating power<sup>3</sup>.

The analysis of a representative survey of students in the USA revealed that the majority of adolescents<sup>4</sup> report having seen advertisements for marijuana products in the past year, via the Internet, in newspapers or magazines, in front of stores or on billboards. The study revealed an association between number of advertisements seen and cannabis use prevalence among these adolescents. The content of these advertisements also draws attention because it reinforces an image of cannabis as a substance to be used anytime, anywhere, without negative consequences.



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In a recent content analysis,<sup>5</sup> cannabis advertisements suggest its use is appropriate when playing sports, traveling, hiking alone in forests and barbecuing with friends.

In addition, ads suggest gifting cannabis products to family and friends on traditional dates like Father's Day, Christmas and during the Thanksgiving celebrations.

New concentrated cannabis products have also been mass produced since legalization, with up to 90% THC<sup>6</sup>, the mind-altering substance in cannabis (cannabis "joints" made from the plant have up to 25% THC). In addition to being much stronger, these cannabis concentrates are highly processed, typically extracted via butane gas, with the inclusion of stabilizers, and products such as glycol, among others. Cannabis concentrates can be used via "vaping pens" or vaporizers, and also in "dabbing", which involves inhaling a high amount of concentrated THC in one hit.

Cannabis use has been increasing among adults (over 25 years) for several years and this increase has intensified with legalization. The same is true among young adults aged 18 to 24 years. Among young minors, the use of cannabis has been shown to be relatively stable, in contrast to the drop in other substances such as alcohol and cocaine.<sup>7</sup>

## THE PREVENTION SOLUTION FOR LATINO/HISPANIC ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN THE USA

Preventing and / or delaying the initiation of these substances is very important for adolescent healthy development, with the goal of supporting the adolescent to grow individually and socially, as a fulfilled and integrated person, with the ability to transform the reality in which they live.

During the first two decades of life, areas of the human brain responsible for managing impulsive behaviors

and maximizing the capacity for decisions based on future impact, are still in development (executive function of the brain). The use of nicotine and cannabis during adolescence can negatively interfere in this process of maturation.

Research has also shown that the sooner the consumption of a substance starts, the greater the chances of developing dependence on it. In the case of electronic cigarettes and concentrated cannabis, the risk to physical health is also significant - these products depend on chemical processes to be manufactured and it is quite common to have residues of substances that can compromise the health of the lungs, among other problems.

Latino/Hispanic adolescents and youth who live in the USA, have been, as expected, using these new substances that were recently legalized for adults. It is worth noting, however, that compared to other segments of the population Latinos do not stand out for a greater or more intense use of these products<sup>6,8</sup>, contrasting with the stereotypes shown in movies and TV series.

Prevention programs to address the use of these new substances should be evidence-based and backed by science. The goal of these programs should be to decrease the vulnerabilities of Latino children and adolescents and to encourage them not to engage in behavior that can bring harm to health (risk factors) and increase the repertoire of resources, personal and social factors that encourage and favor healthy behaviors (protective factors).

Effective prevention programs are multi-dimensional and address various domains of the adolescent's life, including their community, school, family and individual aspects. Their ultimate goal is to maximize the potential of young people to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

## References

<sup>5</sup> [Anytime is the Right Time: A Content Analysis of Marijuana Ads in Freely Distributed Print Media in Western Washington State, USA](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Addictions, Drug & Alcohol Institute. High Potency Cannabis](#)

<sup>7</sup> [2018 National Survey of Drug Use and Health \(NSDUH\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Tobacco Product Use Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2019](#)



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ENGLISH

- [Information about tobacco in Brazil](#)
- [What Families Need to Know to Help Protect Children, Teens and Young Adults](#)
- [MARIJUANA TALK KIT: What you need to know to talk with your teen about marijuana](#)
- [Panel Discussion: The Reality of Legal Marijuana and Hispanic Latino Youth. Myths, Truths, Consequences](#)
- [English Fact Sheet: Marijuana Myths and Facts](#)

### SPANISH

- [E-cigs](#)
- [Vaping and e-cigs classes in Spanish for high school students](#)
- [What Families Need to Know to Help Protect Children, Teens and Young Adults](#)
- [MARIJUANA TALK KIT: What you need to know to talk with your teen about marijuana](#)
- [Spanish Fact Sheet: Marijuana Myths and Facts](#)

### PORTUGUESE

- [Smoking, Vaping, and COVID-19 Emerging Evidence](#)
- [Portuguese Fact Sheet: Marijuana Myths and Facts](#)

Also, you can visit the following websites for additional information.

**SAMHSA's National Helpline**  
Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365  
Treatment Referral Information Service  
in English and Español)  
Website: <http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

**SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline**  
Toll Free: 1-800-985-5990 (español e inglés)  
Text in Spanish: Envíe "Háblanos" al 66746  
Text in English: "TalkWithUs" al 66746  
(TTY): 1-800-846-8517  
English:  
<http://www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>  
Spanish:  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-distress-helpline/espanol>

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
Toll Free: 1-888-628-9454  
English: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
(TTY): 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)  
Spanish:  
<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol/>  
English:  
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

**SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator Sitio**  
Web: <https://findtreatment.gov>

Click here to visit our website and to access more information learn more about the

[National Hispanic and Latino Prevention Technology Transfer Center](#)

National Latino Behavioral Health Association **NLBHA**