

Summer is the Riskiest Time of the Year for Teens and Marijuana

(Washington, D.C.) "Summer may be a vacation for teens, but it presents new challenges for parents," said John P. Walters, Director of National Drug Control Policy. "Many parents don't know that new teen marijuana use spikes in the summer months. Marijuana is riskier than many parents think - in fact, more teens are in treatment for marijuana than for all other illicit drugs combined."

According to data from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, more teens smoked marijuana for the first time in June and July than any other months of the year, and nearly 40% of teens who first tried marijuana did so during May through August. Each day in June and July, approximately 5,800 teens try marijuana for the first time. The number of new underage drinkers and cigarette smokers also jumps during the summer months.

The increase in new drug use is likely due to teens having more unsupervised time in the summer. Research shows that kids with unsupervised time are more likely to engage in risky behaviors. A 2001 study commissioned by the YMCA of the USA found that teens who are unsupervised are three times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs than those who are not.

More teens use marijuana than all other illicit drugs combined. Research shows that marijuana can be addictive, contribute to drunk driving and other dangerous physical activities, and lead to a host of health, social, learning and behavioral problems at a crucial time in young lives.

"In order to combat this problem, teens need to have access to a variety of activities that will interest and engage them during the summer months," said Kenneth L. Gladish, Ph.D., National Executive Director, YMCA of the USA. "When children are unsupervised, they are placed in greater danger. They are also lacking positive interaction with peers and role models, educational opportunities in a supportive environment, and stimulating activities to help them grow" said Peg Smith, Executive Director of the American Camping Association (ACA).

Research shows that parents are the most powerful influence on their teen when it comes to drugs. In fact, two-thirds of kids say that fear of upsetting their parents or of losing the respect of family and friends is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs.

The Campaign has developed and expanded its partnerships with national community groups and corporate partners to help reach parents and teens with marijuana prevention messages this summer, including the YMCA of the USA, American Camping Association, The Mills Corporation, and Cinemark USA, Inc. Cinemark USA, Incorporated, one of the largest U.S. movie theater chains and a large employer of teens, will disseminate marijuana facts to teen employees by distributing postcards and displaying teen posters in employee break rooms.

The Media Campaign is offering new online resources to help parents keep kids drug-free once school is out, including summer parenting tips and an interactive self-rating tool (Does Your Summer Plan Stand the Heat?) to see if their summer plan will keep their teens safe. Both are available on the Campaign's Web site for parents at www.TheAntiDrug.com. The Campaign also offers online materials for community organizations at www.MediaCampaign.org; for employers at www.TheAntiDrug.com/atwork; and for youth at www.Freevibe.com.