Teens’ Attitudes Toward Marijuana Softening

New survey shows a rise in the number of high school seniors who do not view marijuana as harmful to their health.

By Karen Perry

There was troubling news recently on teens’ use and attitudes toward marijuana.

Nearly 60 percent of U.S. high school seniors do not see regular marijuana use as harmful to their health, according to the new Monitoring the Future survey from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). That’s up from nearly 55 percent last year.

Also, more than a third of the seniors surveyed reported smoking marijuana in the past 12 months.

The survey’s experts expect marijuana use among teens to continue rising.

This should be a wake up call to all of us concerned about marijuana, which has become more potent, addictive and dangerous in recent years.

Marijuana is the most commonly used addictive substance by teens. According to NIDA, 1 in 6 youths who begin using marijuana become addicted to it. Once addicted, teens experience a strong craving to the drug, and when they try to stop using it, they endure an uncomfortable period of detoxification.

It’s no wonder that more teens are in treatment for marijuana use than for any other drug.

In releasing the new survey results, NIDA Director Nora D. Volkow, MD said in the statement: “It is important to remember that over the past two decades, levels of THC – the main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana – have gone up a great deal, from 3.75 percent in 1995 to an average of 15 percent in today’s marijuana cigarettes. Daily use today can have stronger effects on a developing teen brain than it did 10 or 20 years ago.”

This is why we need to pay closer attention to the fast spread of marijuana across our nation, with states like Colorado allowing the sale of recreational marijuana to anyone age 21 or older, and with New York looking to become the 21st state to allow medical marijuana.

Interesting side point from the new survey: many of the teens who used marijuana in states with medical marijuana laws said they obtained the drug through their own or someone else’s prescription.

Gil Kerlikowske, director of National Drug Control Policy, interpreted the survey’s results as “a serious setback in our nation’s efforts to raise a healthy generation of young people.” He added: “Teens deserve to grow up in an environment where they are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century, and drug use never factors into that equation. Today’s news
demands that all of us recommit to bolstering the vital role prevention and involved parenting play in keeping young people safe, strong, and ready to succeed.”

I agree.

So again, let’s all do our share in countering the softening attitudes of teens toward marijuana, whose use, as I mentioned earlier, is expected to increase among teens in the coming years.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.