THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Be the Change. Better Decisions. Brighter Futures.

KNOW THE FACTS: Marijuana, Vaping, Alcohol & Smoking

> ***"It's legal, so what's the big deal?"***
> In Michigan, marijuana is legal, but only for adults 21 and older. It is not legal for anyone in middle or high school. And being legal for adults doesn't mean it's safe for a brain and body that are still growing. Here's what the research shows.

Marijuana

- Legal age in Michigan is 21. It's illegal for anyone younger to purchase, possess, or use it. The law exists specifically to protect the developing teen brain.[1]
- Your brain keeps developing into your 20s. Marijuana can change how it grows, affecting the areas responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation.[2]
- Regular, heavy use is linked to lower working memory, slower processing speed, weaker verbal memory, and worse academic performance.[2]
- Teens who use marijuana are more likely to leave high school before graduating or not complete a college degree.[2]
- Use is linked to a higher risk of suicidal thoughts, behaviors, and attempts among teens and young adults.[2]
- Research links cannabis uses to a higher risk of physical violence among teens and young adults, roughly doubling the odds in some studies, with heavier, more frequent use tied to greater risk. The link is real but more moderate than alcohol's (see Alcohol section).[3]
- After Michigan legalized cannabis, reported pediatric marijuana exposures to the Michigan Poison Center increased.[4]
- About 1 in 4 high school seniors nationally report using marijuana in the past year, making it one of the most-used substances among teens.[5]

Vaping / E-Cigarettes

- Most vapes contain nicotine, which is one of the most addictive substances. It can harm brain development up to around age 25.[6]
- Nicotine use during the teen years can damage the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood, and impulse control.[6]
- Vape aerosol can contain cancer-causing chemicals and ultra-fine particles that reach deep into the lungs.[6]
- Most teens who vape say they want to quit, a sign of just how addictive it is.[6]
- In 2025, an estimated 1.13 million high schoolers and 300,000 middle schoolers were current vapers nationally.[7]

Alcohol

- Of all four substances on this sheet, alcohol has the strongest, most well-established link to violence. Underage drinkers, especially those who binge drink, are significantly more likely to be involved in physical or sexual assault, either as the person who causes harm or the person harmed.[8]
- The brain's prefrontal cortex (responsible for planning and decision-making) isn't fully mature until the mid-20s, which is part of why underage drinking is illegal.[9]
- People who start drinking before age 15 are far more likely to develop alcohol use disorder later in life than those who wait until 21.[9]
- Underage drinking contributes to more than 4,300 deaths a year among people under 21, including deaths from violence, drunk driving, and other injuries.[10]

Cigarettes & Smoking

- Youth smoking is at a 25-year low, proof that clear, consistent information changes behavior. That's exactly why this same kind of honest information matters for marijuana, vaping, and alcohol too.[11]
- Nicotine still harms the developing brain, affecting learning, memory, and attention, no matter how it's delivered.[12]
- There's a strong link between youth smoking/nicotine use and depression, anxiety, and stress.[12]
- 87% of adults who ever smoked daily had their first cigarette by age 18. Addiction almost always starts young.[12]

The Bottom Line

Legal doesn't mean safe. It doesn't mean healthy. And for anyone under 21, it usually doesn't even mean legal. The facts above are the same kind of straight information that helped an entire generation understand that smoking causes cancer. The Ripple Effect is about making sure young people have that same clear information about marijuana, vaping, and alcohol, and hearing it from each other, not just from adults.

Sources

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4. Michigan Poison Center pediatric cannabis exposure data, published in ScienceDirect (2020)

5. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), Monitoring the Future survey data, nida.nih.gov

6. CDC, "Health Effects of Vaping" and "Quick Facts on the Risks of E-cigarettes for Kids, Teens, and Young Adults," cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes

7. CDC/FDA National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2025 data, cdc.gov/tobacco

8. CDC, "About Underage Drinking," cdc.gov/alcohol/underage drinking; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), "Underage Drinking," niaaa.nih.gov

9. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), "Alcohol and the Adolescent Brain," niaaa.nih.gov

10. CDC / NIAAA underage drinking data, niaaa.nih.gov

11. CDC, "Youth Tobacco Product Use at a 25-Year Low," cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p1017-youth-tobacco-use.html

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