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**Not Your Parent’s Marijuana**

According to New Opportunities, Inc., a human services agency and The National Institute on Drug Abuse( NIDA), the potency of marijuana has been steadily increasing over the past few decades, but a level of 20 or 30 percent THC is even greater than the institute has reported in the past. As of 2012, NIDA said marijuana confiscated by police agencies nationwide had an average THC concentration of about 15 percent. THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is the psychoactive compound in marijuana that acts on the brain to produce the feeling of being high.

According to the institute, higher concentrations of THC in marijuana could mean "a greater chance of an adverse or unpredictable reaction," especially in new users. And "for frequent users, it may mean a greater risk of addiction." Officials say more potent pot could also be one of the reasons behind a rise in emergency room visits involving marijuana use. Users can mix marijuana in food (edibles), such as brownies, cookies, or candy, or brew it as a tea. A newly popular method of use is smoking or eating different forms of THC-rich resins. Smoking THC-rich resins extracted from the marijuana plant is on the rise. Users call this practice dabbing. People are using various forms of these extracts, such as:

hash oil or honey oil—a gooey liquid

wax or budder—a soft solid with a texture like lip balm

shatter—a hard, amber-colored solid

These extracts can deliver extremely large amounts of THC to users, and their use has sent some people to the emergency room. Another danger is in preparing these extracts, which usually involves butane (lighter fluid). A number of people who have used butane to make extracts at home have caused fires and explosions and have been seriously burned.

Marijuana overactivates parts of the brain that contain the highest number of these receptors. This causes the "high" that users feel. Other effects include:

altered senses (for example, seeing brighter colors)

altered sense of time

changes in mood

impaired body movement

difficulty with thinking and problem-solving

impaired memory

Marijuana also affects brain development. When marijuana users begin using as teenagers, the drug may reduce thinking, memory, and learning functions and affect how the brain builds connections between the areas necessary for these functions. Marijuana use may have a wide range of effects, both physical and mental such as, breathing problems, increased heart rate, problems with child development during pregnancy and after pregnancy, hallucinations, paranioa, depression and anxiety.

New Opportunities Substance Abuse Treatment and Prevention Departments offer information, education, and consultation services to schools, businesses and community based groups, many which are free of charge. If you are interested in learning more on this or other substance abuse topics, please contact Kelsie Richardson/Angie Baack, Prevention Consultant, at krichardson@newopp.org/ abaack@newopp.org or call 712.792.9266.

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