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Press Release

Annual national report on teen drug use mirrors admission trends for Rosecrance patients

Marijuana, synthetic drug use on the rise

ROCKFORD – Marijuana use among teens across the nation rose for the fourth straight year, according to results from the highly respected annual “Monitoring the Future” survey released Dec. 14, 2011, in Washington, D.C.

In addition, the survey indicates that daily marijuana use is at a 30-year peak among high school seniors. The report stated that fewer teens perceive the drug as harmful and that disapproval of its use is dropping.

The annual survey is sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the University of Michigan. The report is considered one of the leading indicators of trends in substance use among the nation’s teenagers.

Trends in the report, which surveyed 47,000 teens in grades 8, 10 and 12, are echoed at drug treatment centers such as Rosecrance in Rockford. Dr. Thomas Wright, chief medical officer for the organization and a board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist, said the report is concerning.

“Cannabis is seen as a potential gateway drug and its use may lead to other drugs and addiction issues,” he said.

Admission trends at the Rosecrance Griffin Williamson Adolescent Treatment Center mirror the big picture. Cannabis has long been the top drug of choice among youth in treatment for substance abuse, and its grip on the population has continued to rise.

Among adolescent patients admitted to treatment last year, 71.4 percent cited marijuana as their preferred drug, compared with 69.5 percent in 2010 and 67.1 percent in 2009.

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Rosecrance has the largest adolescent inpatient treatment center in the state of Illinois. More than 800 adolescents receive treatment annually at the Rockford campus.

Other facts from “Monitoring the Future:”

- The proportion of young people using any illicit drug has risen steadily in recent years, primarily due to the increase in marijuana use.
- 50 percent of high school seniors reported having tried an illicit drug at some time.
- 40 percent of seniors had used one or more drugs in the past year.
- 25 percent of seniors had used one or more drugs in the past month.

Meanwhile, the Rosecrance experience confirms other national trends highlighted in the “Monitoring the Future” survey. Alcohol use and binge drinking have gradually declined. That bit of positive news is countered by the emergence and growing use of “synthetic marijuana” products such as K2 and Spice, both of which can have harmful and even fatal consequences to users.

These new synthetic formulas have unpredictable effects. Rosecrance is treating a growing number of adolescents and young adults for abuse of these drugs. Use of Ecstasy also increased overall in the past year, while the perception of risk and disapproval of the drug declined.

The report also showed that about one-third of teens surveyed reported using energy drinks, which can be harmful if used often. Young teens consume the most energy drinks.

Here is a Q&A with Dr. Thomas Wright about the “Monitoring the Future” report:

Q: The recent Monitoring the Future report said that marijuana use is on the rise among teens and that daily marijuana use among high school seniors is at a 30-year peak. Can you comment on that?

A: It’s concerning, as cannabis is seen as a potential gateway drug and its use may lead to other drugs and addiction issues.

Q: The report says that, in general, teens today don’t perceive that marijuana is harmful or risky behavior. What are you hearing from teens?

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A: When patients come into treatment, this is often the case. However, part of our job is to educate the patient and families about not only the drug, but the disease of addiction.

Q: Meanwhile, the report also says that alcohol and cigarette use are on the decline among teens. Are you encouraged?

A: Well, overall drug use by any drug is still on the rise. So, while we like to see a decrease in some drugs used, there seems to be a tendency where teens just go to something else.

Q: The report also talks about the rise in use of synthetic marijuana, also known as “Spice” or “K2.” Is that also a trend among Rosecrance patients?

A: We have been seeing our patients use synthetic cannabinoids for one to two years. Now, we are beginning to see an emergence of a new hallucinogen called “Bromo-dragonfly.” The availability of this is growing and may be reflected in future data from the Monitoring the Future study.

Q: What advice do you have for parents who suspect that their teens are regular users of marijuana or other drugs?

A: Have a relationship with your teen such that you can discuss and talk to them about these things. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Learn more: <http://www.nida.nih.gov/drugpages/MTF.html>

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About Rosecrance

Rosecrance is a private not-for-profit organization offering behavioral health services for more than 13,000 children, adolescents, adults and families each year. Rosecrance provides addiction treatment through inpatient and outpatient programs in the Rockford area and services at five satellite offices in Chicagoland. In addition, Rosecrance offers community mental health services in Rockford and Belvidere.

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