

# Daily Camera

## Guest Opinion: Kids and THC

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**By Chris Rogers, MD**

I am Dr. Chris Rogers, and to be clear, I am not anti-marijuana. I do not support prohibition or criminalization of marijuana in Colorado. I do, however, support reasonable regulations to put a halt to unsafe practices that sacrifice the lives of kids in Colorado for reckless profit. And I am asking for your help.

As a child and adolescent psychiatrist working in the inpatient setting, I see the tremendous impact of high potency THC on Colorado's kids. Each week we treat kids too psychotic to know where or even who they are. Each week we try to help another suicidal teen break free from cannabis addiction and find hope again. Each week it gets worse. What was a potential trend five years ago is a problem of epidemic proportions now. We need your help.

A decade ago, teens would say marijuana helped their depression when deep down they knew they liked getting high. Now, kids fully believe marijuana is medicine, and more is better. They need our help.

While some disagree with linking depression, suicide and marijuana use, there is a clear risk related to earlier age of first use, and the potency of products used. This means a 12 year-old trying a synthetic derivative with 80% THC is at far greater risk of developing depression or killing themselves than a 30 year-old experimenting with a joint containing 15% THC. Unfortunately it is far too easy for 12 year-olds to get access to these products, and kids aren't being taught that this is dangerous. By the time they experience the truth for themselves it may be too late.

I have been working to educate the community about the risks of unregulated THC products for years. Doctors and parents are shocked to see what's for sale in Colorado's dispensaries. Edibles resembling candy popular with kids. Asthma inhaler shaped vaporizers kids use to get high in class. New products like dabs yield THC concentrations above 80% (marijuana at Woodstock was ~4% THC) and require complex glass pipe rigs

and blow torches to smoke. That's not the marijuana I voted to legalize. The weed I remember didn't need a blow torch to smoke – that was crack.

Taking part in numerous forums discussing THC products, I often see intense opposition by the industry to any regulations. The time has come for this to change. I am asking that leaders in the cannabis industry set aside financial interests to prioritize the health of a generation of kids.

Representative Caraveo and Senator Lundeen are sponsoring legislation that would cap THC potency and implement other sensible safeguards for our community. This could have serious financial impacts on the industry in the short term, but I am reminded of lessons painfully learned. In 1987, RJ Reynolds introduced the Joe Camel campaign and cigarette sales to minors skyrocketed from \$6M to \$476M despite outcry from health experts. Ten years later, RJR paid a \$10M settlement – but had already captured a generation of smokers. Last year Purdue Pharmaceutical paid \$8.3 billion for their role in the opioid epidemic. Marijuana is not as deadly as opiates but again I see an industry ignoring warnings from health experts. Must we learn these lessons again? How much money is a generation of Colorado's kids worth?

Please, stop targeting our kids. Stop hiding the potential dangers of high potency THC products under the guise of healing. We are asking for compromise and leadership from within the industry. We ask that you provide credible research to back up claims of safety for public consumption. Let's come together to plan a responsible future for marijuana in Colorado. The whole country is watching us closely. We led the country in legalization, now let's lead the country in responsible, sustainable safety measures.

*Chris Rogers, MD, is medical director of child & adolescent services at The Medical Center of Aurora*