

NEW: Legalizing Marijuana Won't Hurt Kids, Says RI Hospital Study

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Will legalizing marijuana in Rhode Island increase use among youth? No, says a new study out of [Rhode Island Hospital](#).

Physician/researcher and lead author Esther Choo, MD, MPH, is presenting the findings of the study today at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Exposition.

Choo, an [emergency medicine physician with Rhode Island Hospital](#), and her coauthors explain that the state-level legalization of medical marijuana has raised concerns about increased accessibility and appeal of the drug to youth, who are most vulnerable to public messages about drug use and to the adverse consequences of marijuana. Their study was performed to assess the impact of medical marijuana legalization in Rhode Island in 2006. The researchers compared trends in adolescent marijuana use between Rhode Island and Massachusetts using a self-report called the Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System. In their study, they included surveys completed between 1997 and 2009.

Based on their analysis of 32,570 students, they found that while marijuana use was common throughout the study period, there were no statistically significant differences in marijuana use between states in any year.

Medical marijuana: no statistical threat to kids

Choo says, "Our study did not find increases in adolescent marijuana use related to Rhode Island's 2006 legalization of medical marijuana; however, additional research may follow future trends as medical marijuana in Rhode Island and other states becomes more widely used."

The study was funded by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. Choo's principal affiliation is Rhode Island Hospital, a member hospital of the Lifespan health system in Rhode Island, and direct financial and infrastructure support for this project was received through the Lifespan Office of Research Administration. Choo also holds an academic appointment, assistant professor of emergency medicine, at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

Other researchers involved in the study with Choo include Nicholas Zaller, Ph.D., of The Miriam Hospital and Alpert Medical School, Jason Mechan, Ph.D., of Rhode Island Hospital and Alpert Medical School, Kristin Rising, M.D., of Boston Medical Center, and John McConnell, Ph.D., of Oregon Health & Science University.

