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Health Department to Focus on Youth in First Recreational Cannabis Public Health Campaign

**Most San Francisco teenagers do not use cannabis (marijuana)
*Clear information about facts and risks will provide decision support in new era***

SAN FRANCISCO (December 28, 2017) -- As San Francisco prepares for the legal sale of adult-use cannabis beginning in January, the Health Department will be providing the facts and risks to support healthy decisions in this new era.

The longer term public health impact of increased consumption of cannabis, the plant from which marijuana is derived, is not well understood at this time, as legalization is relatively new across the United States. Colorado and Washington states were the first to do so in 2012. In San Francisco, the potential impact on young people will be the subject of an upcoming public awareness and education campaign, due to launch early next year. The campaign will include social media PSAs and will be tested by youth focus groups.

“With the loosening of restrictions for adults, and the expected surge in cannabis businesses and advertising, it is crucial that teenagers know the facts,” said Barbara Garcia, San Francisco Health Director. “Young people are smart. We need to support them with clear information about the new law, the risks of cannabis use and how to withstand the influence of targeted advertising.”

California voters approved Proposition 64, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act, in November 2016. The law makes it legal for people 21 and older to use, possess and make non-medical cannabis available for retail sale. The San Francisco Office of Cannabis oversees the local program, and the Health Department will support it through health education and assessment, environmental health monitoring and inspection, and care for people who develop medical or substance use problems related to recreational cannabis.

Youth consumption of cannabis here is lower than the national average. Seventy-one percent of San Francisco high school students have never used cannabis, compared to 59 percent of their counterparts nationwide, according to a 2015 study by the National Drug Early Warning System.

San Francisco Unified School District data show that 83 percent of high school students are not current users of cannabis and 93 percent of middle school students are not. The results are an aggregation of the CDC's National Youth Health Behavioral Survey, administered by the school district from 2009 to 2015, showing trends over time.

"Using cannabis is not something that every teenager does, despite the myths and messages to the contrary," Garcia said. "We'd like to keep it that way, and support youth in their decision making. We want to make sure they know that cannabis is still illegal if you're under 21."

Disparities among youth who consume are emerging and give cause for concern. In San Francisco high schools, American Indian, African American and white students reported the highest rates of use, at 49 percent, 37 percent and 35 percent, respectively. Also, 29 percent of Latino and 27 percent of Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students reported current use. Asian students tended to have lower rates, with 3 percent of Chinese students reporting current use of cannabis, 14 percent of Filipinos and 12 percent of other Asian students. Boys and girls report similar consumption, but disparities exist in terms of sexual orientation, with LGBT students reporting a higher rate of cannabis use than other students.

"Delaying cannabis consumption is the smart thing you can do for your brain, which is still developing into your 20s," said Dr. Tomas Aragon, San Francisco Health Officer. "While you are young, cannabis can harm your memory and ability to learn and pay attention. It also impairs driving, and you can get a DUI by driving high."

Cannabis-related health risks are greater for young people. Smoking it can increase the risk of respiratory illness, and decreased motivation and memory can inhibit youth from reaching their goals as they grow into adulthood.

The Health Department's [Health Impact Assessment of Adult Use Cannabis Legalization in San Francisco](#) highlights additional health issues to watch, including:

- The locations of cannabis retailers, so that low income neighborhoods, communities of color and the youth who live there are not disproportionately impacted, as in the case of liquor stores and tobacco retailers.
- The strength and proper dosing of edibles, which take time to affect a consumer and can lead to unintentional poisoning causing extreme discomfort, disorientation, emergency room visits and hospitalization.
- The impact of advertising on youth. State law prohibits any advertising or marketing of cannabis or cannabis products on an advertising sign within 1,000 feet a day care center, school providing instruction in kindergarten or any grades 1 through 12, playground, or youth center.

California was the first state to legalize medical cannabis in 1996, and has since been joined by 29 other states and the District of Columbia. Eight states plus DC have legalized recreational cannabis since 2012.