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Medical marijuana laws linked to higher overall usage

By Shari Roan, Los Angeles Times / For the Booster Shots blog

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Medical marijuana laws have been passed in 16 states, usually following vigorous debate about whether the benefits of medical marijuana for treating illness outweigh the risks of making the drug much easier for anyone to obtain.

Two new studies shed some light on that question. A study in the September issue of [Annals of Epidemiology](#) found that, among youths age 12 to 17, marijuana usage rates were higher in states with medical marijuana laws (8.6%) compared with those without such laws (6.9%).

A similar study of people age 18 and older, published in the journal [Drug and Alcohol Dependence](#), found the odds of marijuana abuse or dependence were almost twice as high in states with medical marijuana laws compared with those without such laws.

The reasons behind greater drug use in states with medical marijuana laws is not made clear by these studies. It could be that states that pass legalization laws embrace cultural values that also make marijuana use more acceptable, overall, and less stigmatized.

But it's also possible that passing marijuana laws leads the residents of a state to adopt more relaxed views about marijuana and its risks.

More studies are needed, the authors said, "given the fast-changing nature of medical marijuana laws and the fact that most claims about its association with adolescent marijuana use are based on opinion..."

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<http://www.latimes.com/health/boostershots/la-heb-medical-marijuana-20110901,0,7896642.story>