

DRAFT

SURGEON GENERAL'S ADVISORY ON MARIJUANA

The health consequences of marijuana use have been the subject of scientific and public debate for almost 20 years. Based on scientific evidence published to date, it is the opinion of the Department of Health and Human Services that marijuana has a broad range of psychological and biological effects, many of which are dangerous and harmful to health.

Marijuana use is a major public health problem in the United States. In the past 20 years, there has been a 30-fold increase in the drug's use. More than a quarter of the American population have used the drug. The age of first use of marijuana has been getting consistently younger and is now most often in the junior high school years. Until recently, nearly 11 percent of high school seniors used the drug daily; and although this figure had declined to 7 percent, its daily use is still greater than that of alcohol.

On March 24, Secretary Schweiker transmitted to the U.S. Congress a report reviewing the health consequences of marijuana use. Marijuana and Health: 1982, the ninth in a series, is primarily based on two recently conducted comprehensive scientific reviews on the subject: one undertaken by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences and the other by the Canadian Addiction Research Foundation for the World Health Organization (WHO). Both independent reviews corroborate the Department's prior findings of health hazards associated with marijuana use, including:

- ° Acute intoxication with marijuana interferes with many aspects of mental functioning and has serious acute effects on perception and skilled performance, such as driving and other complex tasks involving judgment or ~~fine~~ motor skills.

Perhaps add other acute effects - see letter

- ° Among the known or suspected chronic effects of marijuana use are:
 - impaired lung function similar to that found in cigarette smokers. Indications are that more serious effects such as cancer and other lung disease may ensue following extended use;
 - decreased sperm count and sperm mobility;
 - interference with ovulation and prenatal development;
 - impaired immune response;
 - possible adverse effects on heart function; and
 - the by-products of marijuana remain in body fat for several weeks *add here too (see letter).*

I am especially concerned about the long-term developmental effects of marijuana use on children and adolescents, who are particularly vulnerable to the drug's behavioral and physiological effects. The "amotivational syndrome" has been attributed by some to prolonged use of marijuana by youth. The syndrome is characterized by a pattern of loss of energy, diminished school performance, harmed parental relationships, and other behavioral disruptions. Though more

research is required to clarify the course and extent, in recent national surveys up to 40 percent of heavy users report that they observe some or all of these symptoms in themselves.

In summary, this Department's review of the health consequences of marijuana supports the major conclusion of the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine:

What little we know for certain about the effects of marijuana on human health--and all that we have reason to suspect--justifies serious national concern.

Marijuana is not a benign drug. As Surgeon General, I urge other physicians and professionals to advise parents and patients about the harmful effects of using marijuana and to urge discontinuation of its use.