

# Marijuana in Washington, DC

---

**Arrests, Usage, and Related Data**

**Jon Gettman , Ph.D.**

**The Bulletin of Cannabis Reform**

**[www.drugscience.org](http://www.drugscience.org)**

**November 5, 2009**

# Marijuana in Washington, DC

## Introduction

This state report is part of a comprehensive presentation of national, state, county, and local level data on marijuana arrests in the United States. The primary report in this collection is "Marijuana Arrests in the United States (2007)".<sup>1</sup> Additional details on marijuana arrests and related topics in Washington, DC are available in the Marijuana Policy Almanac<sup>2</sup>, from which the data presented below has been excerpted. Arrest totals are based on Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program data; local data may differ due to various reasons, including reporting procedures and data availability.

Arrest data for this report was obtained from the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department rather than the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. The Metropolitan Police Department categorizes arrest statistics based on the city's criminal code, and the source data is much more detailed than the data provided by the UCR Program. Consequently, because some offenses may have been characterized differently, caution must be exercised in comparing DC arrest data with other jurisdictions which report data to the UCR program.

There were 3,985 arrests for marijuana offenses in Washington, DC in 2007, representing an arrest rate of 677 per 100,000, which ranks Washington, DC at number 1 in the nation. There were an estimated 78,000 past year marijuana users in Washington, DC during 2007. Reconciling this estimate with the number of arrests for marijuana offenses provides an arrest rate of 5,109 per 100,000 users, which ranks Washington, DC at number 9 in the nation.

In terms of overall severity of maximum sentences for marijuana possession, Washington, DC ranks number 34 in the nation (based on penalties for a first offense). When it comes to penalties for just under 1 ounce of marijuana, Washington, DC is ranked at number 4, along with 9 other states (because of similarities between states there are only 12 rankings in this category). Here are the penalties for possession of various amounts of marijuana in Washington, DC:

<b>Amount</b>	<b>Max. Sentence</b>	<b>Max. Fine</b>
<b>1 Ounce*</b>	6 months	\$1,000
<b>2 Ounces</b>	6 months	\$1,000
<b>3 Ounces</b>	6 months	\$1,000
<b>4 Ounces</b>	6 months	\$1,000

(\*To simplify comparisons, for some states this category covers amounts just under 1 ounce)

Marijuana possession arrests accounted for 28% of all marijuana arrests in Washington, DC during 2007. (Nationally, marijuana possession arrests account for 89% of all marijuana arrests.) There were 1,110 arrests for marijuana possession in Washington, DC in 2007, and 2,875 arrests for marijuana sales. The arrest rate for marijuana possession in Washington, DC was 489 per 100,000 for 2007, while the arrest rate for marijuana sales was 189. Marijuana arrests also accounted for 37% of all drug arrests in Washington, DC during 2007.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.drugscience.org/Archive/bcr7/bcr7\\_index.html](http://www.drugscience.org/Archive/bcr7/bcr7_index.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.drugscience.org/States/US/US\\_home.htm](http://www.drugscience.org/States/US/US_home.htm)

# Marijuana in Washington, DC

Here is an overall scorecard for how Washington, DC ranks nationally in terms of marijuana arrests, penalties, and marijuana use.

Category	Ranking
Maximum Sentences for Possession	34
Maximum Sentence for Possession of 1 ounce	4
Arrest Rate per 100,000 population	1
Arrest Rate per 100,000 users	9
Past Month Users (Pct.)	3
Past Year Users (Pct.)	3
Past Month Users Age 12 – 17 (Pct.)	24
Past Year Users Age 12 – 17 (Pct.)	21

This report provides a summary of the following topics related to marijuana arrests in Washington, DC: (1) related national trends, (2) trends in Washington, DC marijuana arrests and marijuana use, (3) the costs of marijuana arrests in Washington, DC, and (4) statistics on past month and past year marijuana use in Washington, DC by age group. Extensive detail on these and related subjects, including local agency marijuana arrest data and historical data, is available in table format in the on-line Marijuana Policy Almanac for Washington, DC and other states, as well as similar national data.

## 1) Background – National Trends in Arrests and Marijuana Use from 2003 to 2007

While marijuana arrests have increased significantly since the 1980s, the prevalence of marijuana use in the United States has remained essentially unchanged.

Marijuana arrests in the United States increased from 755,200 in 2003 to 872,720 in 2007. This represents an average annualized change of +2.93% per year.

Historically, marijuana arrests in the United States increased by 150% in the 1990s, rising dramatically from 287,850 in 1991 to 723,627 in 2001, an average annualized change of 8.74% per year. During this time the number of individuals who reported marijuana use in national surveys increased modestly from 19.2 million in 1991 to 21 million in 2001.

The arrest rate for marijuana offenses (possession and sales combined) in the United States has increased from 260 per 100,000 in 2003 to 290 in 2007. This represents an average annualized change of +2.19% per year.

The number of past year marijuana users in the United States has remained relatively stable during this period, changing from 25.5 million annual users in 2003 to 25.2 million annual users in 2007. The number of past month users has also remained the same, 14.6 million in both 2003 and 2007.

On a percentage basis, annual marijuana use was reported by 10.78% of the population in 2003 and 10.22% in 2007, while monthly use was reported by 6.18% in 2003 and 5.92% in 2007.

Consequently, at the national level over the last five years, an increase in marijuana arrests of 2.93% per year has resulted in an average annualized decrease in the number of annual marijuana users of 0.21% per year and a similar decrease in the prevalence of annual marijuana use of 0.03% per year.

# Marijuana in Washington, DC

## 2) Marijuana Arrest and Use Trends in Washington, DC (2003 – 2007)

Marijuana arrests in Washington, DC increased from 3,651 in 2003 to 3,985 in 2007. The arrest rate in 2003 was 654 per 100,000 while in 2007 it was 677.

Compared to a 2.93% average annual increase in marijuana arrests nationally, marijuana arrests in Washington, DC increased by 1.77% per year. (While the arrest rate nationally increased 2.19% annually in this period, in Washington, DC the arrest rate changed by 1.43% per year.)

During this same period, the number of annual marijuana users in Washington, DC increased from 72,000 in 2003 to 78,000 in 2007. This was an average annualized change of 1.61% per year. The number of monthly marijuana users increased from 40,000 in 2003 to 49,000 in 2007, which produced an average annualized change of 4.14%.

## 3) The Costs of Marijuana Laws

The above comparison of marijuana arrests and marijuana use provide a basis for evaluating the benefits of marijuana laws. Here are three perspectives that help frame the issue of evaluating the costs of marijuana laws in Washington, DC.

### a) Fiscal Costs.

The criminal justice system in Washington, DC cost \$770.69 million for 2006. This includes state, county, and local costs. Here is the breakdown for those costs:

Police Protection	\$493.23 million
Judicial and Legal Services	\$71.90 million
Corrections	\$205.56 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$770.69 million</b>

The federal Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) provides a simple way of making a general estimate of the criminal justice costs of drug-related arrests. Actually, estimating the costs of different types of arrests is a very complicated challenge because of the differences between individual offenses and, for example, the investigative and follow-up work they require. However the use of a percentage basis method provides a general estimate of the costs associated with marijuana offenses. The method utilized by ONDCP is to (a) calculate the percentage of total arrests accounted for by drug arrests and then (b) apply that percentage to total criminal justice system costs.

There were 51,339 arrests in Washington, DC in 2006. There were 3,985 marijuana arrests that year, accounting for 7.76% of all arrests in Washington, DC for 2006. Consequently, according to this percentage basis method of estimation, marijuana arrests cost \$59.81 million in Washington, DC for 2006.

### B) Opportunity Costs.

Marijuana arrests divert law enforcement and criminal justice system resources from possession and sales offenses involving other illicit drugs. In 2007, marijuana arrests were 37% of all drug arrests in Washington, DC. Other drugs such as cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and synthetic narcotics such

## Marijuana in Washington, DC

as Oxycontin present far more serious threats to both individuals and the public. These other illegal drugs also have far more severe dependence liabilities than marijuana. Here is a summary of drug arrests in Washington, DC for 2007:

<b>Drug</b>	<b>Arrests</b>	<b>Pct.</b>
Opiates/Cocaine	5684	53%
Marijuana	3,985	37%
Synthetic Narcotics	0	0%
Other Dangerous Drugs	981	9%
<b>All Illicit Drugs</b>	<b>10650</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **c) Social Costs**

Marijuana arrests have a disproportionate impact on two demographic groups – young people and minorities. In many cases an arrest for marijuana possession makes a criminal out of an otherwise law-abiding individual. It is not surprising that the majority of marijuana arrests involve teenagers and young adults given the popularity of marijuana use with younger age groups. However differences in the arrest rates between whites and blacks cannot be explained by differences in marijuana use. In 2007, for example, 10.5% of whites used marijuana in the last year while 12.2% of blacks reported such use. For marijuana use in the last month, the comparable figures were 6% of whites and 7.2% of blacks. These figures indicate that marijuana use by blacks is about 20% more prevalent than use by whites. While this is a statistically significant difference, it does not explain why arrest rates for marijuana possession for blacks are three times higher nationally than for whites. For example, the arrest rate per 100,000 for blacks in 2007 was 598, while for whites the arrest rate was 195.

Here are selected 2007 marijuana possession arrest rates for Washington, DC:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Pct of Arrests</b>	<b>Arrest Rate per 100,000</b>
All individuals	100%	489
Males age 15 to 19	14%	1,988
Females age 15 to 19	1%	179
Males age 20 to 24	23%	2,681
Females age 20 to 24	4%	349
Whites	8%	100
Blacks	91%	808

### **4) Marijuana Use**

There were 78,000 annual marijuana users in Washington, DC during 2007, of which 49,000 reported marijuana use in the past month. As noted above, the number of annual marijuana users in Washington, DC increased from 72,000 in 2003 to 78,000 in 2007. This was an average annualized change of 1.61% per year. The number of monthly marijuana users increased from 40,000 in 2003 to 49,000 in 2007, which produced an average annualized change of 4.14%.

There is general consensus that minors should not use alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco. According to the most recent (2007) data 13.30% or 5,000 youths aged 12 to 17 in Washington, DC used marijuana in the past year. Of these, 6.90% (of the total population of this age group) or 3,000 youths used marijuana in

## Marijuana in Washington, DC

the past month. Marijuana's illegal status did not prevent these youths from having access to marijuana. Indeed, most teenagers report that marijuana is fairly easy to obtain. One of the reasons marijuana remains easy for youths to obtain is the profit incentive created by the illegal market. Simply put, teenagers make money by selling marijuana to other youths, which increases the availability of marijuana among teens. In this way, marijuana's illegality makes it more widely and readily available to teenagers.

Here are data on the prevalence and population estimates for marijuana use by various age groups in Washington, DC:

### Past Month Marijuana Use (2007)

Age	Pct.	Pop.
Age 12 to 17	6.90%	3,000
Age 18 to 25	23.70%	19,000
Age 26 +	7.10%	27,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.80%</b>	<b>49,000</b>

### Past Year Marijuana Use (2007)

Age	Pct.	Pop.
Age 12 to 17	13.30%	5,000
Age 18 to 25	37.80%	31,000
Age 26 +	11.20%	42,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>15.70%</b>	<b>78,000</b>

### Sources:

Sentences for Marijuana Possession were obtained from: ImpactTeen Illicit Drug Team. Illicit drug policies: Selected laws from the 50 states. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2002. [http://www.impactteen.org/generalarea\\_PDFs/IDTchartbook032103.pdf](http://www.impactteen.org/generalarea_PDFs/IDTchartbook032103.pdf) and updated from other sources. Rankings of sentences were calculated independently and are based on the maximum number of days allowed by state law for the listed quantities of marijuana. The overall ranking is based on a weighted index for the four quantity levels. The weighting used in this index was: 70% for penalties for 1 ounce and 10% each for the penalties for 2, 3, and 4 ounces.

All arrest data were obtained from the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. Data on drug use were obtained from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH); data on drug treatment admissions were obtained from the Treatment Episodes Data Set (TEDS). NSDUH and TEDS are compiled and published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Data on Criminal Justice Service costs were obtained from the Criminal Justice Expenditure and Employment Extracts Program (CJEE) of the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice. More information on source data for this report can be obtained at <http://www.drugscience.org/States/Notes.htm>