



Project ALERT Plus May Leverage the Effect of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign

Since it first “went national” in 1998, the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign (the Campaign) has aired a slew of anti-drug messages in paid and donated advertising across a full range of media. But while a multiyear evaluation showed that the Campaign raised exposure to anti-drug media messages among youth, it also showed that the Campaign had no favorable effect on marijuana use—one of its key targets.

But what happens when exposure to the Campaign is combined with a school-based drug prevention curriculum? Because the first year of the Campaign’s full implementation phase fortuitously coincided with the ninth-grade year of a trial of Project ALERT Plus—a drug prevention curriculum for middle school students that has been recognized as an exemplary program by the Department of Education and as a model program by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention—RAND Corporation researchers were able to answer that question. The results are promising:

- Marijuana use in the past month was significantly less likely among the entire sample of adolescents who received both the ALERT Plus curriculum and weekly exposure to the Campaign’s anti-drug messages.
- While the effect on marijuana use at the ninth grade in the straight ALERT Plus curriculum was confined to high-risk girls and there was no apparent effect on the entire sample of youth, the synergistic effect of ALERT Plus and the Campaign did curb marijuana use in the entire sample. Thus, in this analysis, the synergy was reciprocal: Neither ALERT Plus nor the Campaign had a substantial effect on marijuana use in the entire sample in the absence of the other.
- Although the amount of exposure appears to have been important, the content of the Campaign’s messages may also have been crucial. Like ALERT Plus and other effective school-based curricula, the Campaign was based on a social influence model that stresses resistance, self-efficacy, anti-drug norms, and the negative consequences of use. Thus, the synergy achieved was in both substantive content and timing.

The results suggest that the effects of anti-drug messages and school-based drug prevention are broadest and most substantial when both are delivered in tandem.

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This fact sheet is based on:

Douglas Longshore, Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, and Phyllis Ellickson, "National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign and school-based drug prevention: Evidence for a synergistic effect in ALERT Plus," *Addictive Behaviors*, June 22, 2005 (Epub ahead of print).

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RB-9167 (2006)

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