



*“My kid doesn’t smoke pot. He’s either at school, soccer practice, piano lessons or at a friend’s house.”*

## Four-Twenty, 4:20, 4/20—However it’s expressed, its meaning is the same

In the shadow of New Year’s celebrations now faded, comes the knowledge that another celebration of a different new year is fast approaching. April 20 is often referred to as “Stoner’s New Year.” Four-twenty, represented as the time 4:20 or date 4/20, is something that drug users young and old alike know about and celebrate. It has become the time of day, especially on April 20, when marijuana users light up and marijuana chat rooms on the Internet see the numbers of chatters logging on peak. If you don’t know about it or even if you do, you are sure to add to your knowledge as you read on.

### Where does this phrase come from? Why that time? Why that date?

Perhaps it’s a take-off on “tea time,” with “t” being a known synonym for marijuana. The magazine *High Times* once attributed the phrase to the code used by San Rafael, California police for “person smoking marijuana.” The police there as well as in Los Angeles and San Francisco all deny that such a code exists. In fact, when looking at the California penal code, section 420 actually has to do with trespassing on public property and was repealed in 1995. It has nothing to do with drug use or mental health. Other theories contend that Jim Morrison of The

Doors died on that date and that there are 420 chemicals in marijuana. Both of these theories are easily disproved. Morrison died on July 13 and marijuana is composed of approximately 315 chemicals. The speculation goes on and includes the following theories that 4:20 relates to:

- ▶ 5:14 in the King James Version of the Christian Bible that says “And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.”
- ▶ The old nursery rhyme line about the four and twenty black birds baked in a pie—someone who is “baked” or is a “baker” is a marijuana smoker.
- ▶ The belief that if you smoked marijuana at 4:20, your high would peak when the Grateful Dead went on stage.

*“I usually get stoned at school, after soccer practice, before piano lessons or at my friend’s house.”*



### Influences in Pop Culture

On *The Simpsons* episode that aired on 4/20/99, Homer mentions to Flanders that Barney’s birthday is April 20th and in that same episode, the jackpot sign in the casino reads \$420,000. In Quentin Tarantino’s movie, *Pulp Fiction*, all the clocks are all set to 4:20.

### And the answer is...

The most plausible theory seems to be the one featured on some Web sites. It says that a group of high school students in San Rafael in 1971 who called themselves “the Waldos,” were the originators of the code word so they could talk about marijuana in front of parents and teachers. It is said that they would be in school hallways, see another “Waldo” and say “Louis, 420” to tell the other person to meet at the statue of Louis Pasteur at 4:20 that afternoon, presumably to smoke marijuana. Since this tradition began in the 1970’s it has spread and become both a nationwide phenomenon and a holiday for cannabis smokers.

As more and more people learn of the code word, it becomes less powerful. No longer is it a case of “I know something you don’t know” now that we are clued in. Parents, counselors and law enforcement officials need to know to be aware of what their loved ones are doing on April 20 every year and to see if the time 4:20 holds any significance for particular behavior patterns. April 20 can be a trigger day and 4:20 can be a trigger time for people in early recovery.

NOTE: The mom and kid photos with quotes used here are available from our clearinghouse as a camera-ready poster. For more information or to order, call 763-427-5310 or 1-800-782-1878 or e-mail [mprc-order@miph.org](mailto:mprc-order@miph.org).