

Marijuana Poisoning

What to Know – What to Do



With the increase in legalized marijuana for recreational and medical use comes another increase: accessibility to young children and the potential for marijuana poisoning. Marijuana poisoning is on the rise say researchers from the Central Ohio Poison Center at Nationwide Children's Hospital¹. They found from January 2000-June 2017:

- 27%** mean annual increase of marijuana ingestion in children
- 72.4%** of exposures were in children younger than age 3
- 50%** had to receive hospital care, including critical care
- 70%** of these cases occurred in states where marijuana is legal

Though rare, some children have died from accidental marijuana ingestion.² One way ingestion can be harmful or even fatal to children is if the child ingests marijuana and gets both hungry and drowsy. If the child overeats, falls asleep and vomits, the child may unknowingly choke on his or her own vomit.

The risk for harm to children (adults, too) is more likely to show up as confusion, drowsiness, seizures, and coma. There is no antidote for marijuana poisoning, though medical treatment may be administered to help alleviate symptoms. Treatment can include hydration therapy, sedation, or intubation.

The Danger of Edibles

Food and beverages infused with marijuana, known as edibles, offer a greater risk of poisoning because (1) it takes longer to feel the effect so people may ingest too much, and (2) the active ingredient, THC, is often difficult to measure or unknown.³

For children, marijuana not only affects them differently than adults, but edibles – many of which are legal in some states – look especially appealing. Thinking these marijuana products are treats, children may eat them, become sick, and require emergency medical care.⁴

Marijuana Edibles Through a Child's Eyes

- Once opened and out of their original packaging, marijuana edibles, such as candies, cookies, and brownies, look just like everyday treats to kids.
- Most children will take at least one piece of candy or a cookie – and probably more – despite the fact that a single edible item could possibly contain 5 to 6 servings of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC.⁴

Get Emergency Help

If you think someone may be poisoned, call 1-800-222-1222.
If the person is unconscious, call 911.

This national poison emergency hotline will connect you to your nearest poison center. Ohio has two regional poison centers, one in Columbus and the other in Cincinnati.

For poison resources, information, and more, visit bepoisonsmart.org.

Marijuana Poisoning Rising for All Ages

Researchers have found a statistical association between cannabis use and increased risk of overdose injuries, including respiratory distress, among youth in states where marijuana has been legalized.⁵ Changing medical marijuana laws and increases in retail cannabis sales may make higher-potency edible products and concentrated extracts more accessible to children and youth.⁶

This, along with increases in pediatric exposure cases have led some to call for stronger regulations to prevent unintentional exposure to children and enhanced restrictions to prevent use by teenagers. Emergency medicine physician and NNE Poison Center director, Dr. Karen Simone, says the rise in poison center calls and ER visits jumped in both Maine and Colorado once the drug was legalized.⁷

“Every time you make marijuana more acceptable and more available ... it opens up the door to more marijuana being out where kids can reach it.”

– KAREN SIMONE, MD

Adults aren't immune to marijuana poisoning either. Cannabis-related poison cases among adults ages 50+ saw an 18-fold increase in the 10-year period starting 2009.⁸ These cases typically involved cannabis products other than plant forms, which have become much more widely available since the legalization of recreational and medicinal forms of marijuana.

About Us

Prevention
Action Alliance



Prevention Action Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit located in Columbus, Ohio. We're dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Learn more at preventionactionalliance.org.

The mission of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) is to provide statewide leadership on the topics of mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery. Learn more about OhioMHAS at mha.ohio.gov.

About This Campaign

Because much of the public conversation surrounding marijuana has been based on anecdotes rather than science, Prevention Action Alliance and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services created this campaign to help people better understand the facts about marijuana and its effects.

If you found this article helpful, we encourage you to share it with others. You can also find other fact sheets about marijuana at: preventionactionalliance.org/marijuana

If you have concerns about your own use of marijuana or a loved one's, and wish to seek help, go to: findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

Contact Us

For more information on marijuana, please contact us at:
Prevention Action Alliance
(614) 540-9985
preventionactionalliance.org

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