

Marijuana: Conception, Pregnancy, and Breastfeeding

What You Need to Know



Beginning in 2016, a majority of U.S. states began legalizing marijuana for medical use. As of 2020, 11 states have legalized it fully, including for recreational use. In Ohio, it's been legal to use as medicine since 2016, but is still considered a crime to use recreationally. With its growing acceptance and popularity all over America, Ohio expects to see full legalization, including for recreational use, on the ballot by 2021.

While we at the Prevention Action Alliance believe that the marijuana plant contains components that are promising, we have seen anecdotal evidence favored over scientific fact time and time again. We believe the lack of objective, peer-reviewed research poses a threat to the health and safety of the many people who partake in marijuana, particularly:

- Unborn children of mothers who smoke or otherwise ingest it
- Breastfeeding babies of mothers who currently or previously ingested it

Marijuana and Pregnancy

Marijuana is the most commonly used illegal drug on the rise for pregnant women, especially those 24 and under, though self-reporting only tells half the story¹. While some women take it to reduce nausea and morning sickness, medical experts caution against that because no research exists that proves it's safe for the mother or the baby². And, because THC levels are higher than ever, smoking, eating, or vaping marijuana has not been proven to be safe for a baby's development².

Studies have shown that using marijuana during pregnancy can lead to many risks for the baby's health, including²:

- Low Birth Weight
- Higher Chance of Stillbirth
- Greater Risk of Being Born Premature
- Long Term Development Problems, including Learning Disabilities and Behavioral Issues

Marijuana Before, Marijuana Now

The gradual legalization of marijuana has produced many changes. Scientists are able to study the drug and its effects more easily, which will inform and educate Americans in the coming decades.

However, with legalization, manufacturers can now make the drug exponentially stronger. In the 1970s, THC—the psychoactive ingredient—was normally about 3%, whereas now it can be anywhere between 12% to 30%. Oil that you rub on your skin can have up to a 100% THC level.

Levels this high are extremely dangerous. They can cause psychotic events and permanent mental damage.

Using Marijuana While Breastfeeding

While many mothers who use marijuana may think it's safe to do so after the baby is born, while they're breastfeeding, it hasn't been proven to be safe. In 2018, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics published a study that found that THC was discovered in breast milk up to six days after the marijuana was ingested in a majority of participants³.

This means that "pumping and dumping," which many nursing mothers do if they want to drink alcohol but avoid passing it along to the baby via their breastmilk, would not be effective with marijuana use. There is even evidence that suggests that exposure to THC through breastmilk during the baby's first month of life can lead to decreased motor development later¹.

Marijuana and Fertility

Marijuana may disrupt a woman's menstrual cycle and in vitro fertilization (IVF) procedures, making it harder for a woman to become pregnant⁴. The problem can go even deeper in male partners trying to conceive. Men who smoke pot as little as once a week doubled the couple's risk of miscarriage according to new research out of the Boston University School of Public Health⁵. The study controlled for other risk factors. Not only did marijuana use increase the couple's risk of miscarriage, men who smoked marijuana had:

- Lower sperm count
- Sperm that behaved abnormally
- Sperm with reduced active movement

Because of these results, the researchers on the study recommend that men who are trying to conceive abstain from marijuana entirely.

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, Pregnancy, and Breastfeeding, please contact us at:

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About Us

Prevention
Action Alliance



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

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

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