

Marijuana (cannabis):

What Parents and Caretakers Need to Know

Marijuana is a controversial subject. Laws and attitudes about marijuana use are undergoing changes in Virginia and throughout the U.S. Some people welcome these changes, some are deeply concerned. But there is one thing we can all agree on—we need to protect the health and well-being of our youth.

Marijuana is not safe for children and adolescents.

NOT YOUR PARENT'S WEED

Marijuana is 10 to 30 times stronger (more potent) today than it was decades ago. Higher potency is linked to more severe health effects, including anxiety, agitation, paranoia, and psychosis. High potency is also associated with an increased risk of dependence and addiction, particularly for teens.



NEW WAYS TO CONSUME...AND CONCEAL

Today, *cannabis concentrates* are increasingly popular and available. These are made by distilling THC—the chemical compound responsible for marijuana's psychoactive effects—from the marijuana plant into an oily liquid, a waxy residue, or a brittle substance. Cannabis concentrates have a potency of 40-60% THC or even higher. Concentrates can be used to make cannabis *edibles*: snacks, candies, or beverages which contain THC. They can also be smoked, heated with a special type of bong (this is called 'dabbing') or placed into an electronic vaping device. Vaping marijuana does not produce smoke or odor and is therefore easy to conceal.

What do the numbers say? According to the 2023 *Monitoring the Future Survey on Drug Use*:

- Marijuana is **the most commonly used illicit substance** among adolescents.
- For the three grade levels surveyed, 8.3% of eighth graders, 17.8% of tenth graders, and 29% of twelfth graders reported using cannabis in the past year.
- It was also reported that 39.2% of students surveyed in the same three grade levels reported **vaping cannabis** within the past year.
- Among college-aged adults, cannabis and hallucinogen use remained at historic highs. Approximately 42% of adults aged 19-30 reported cannabis use in the past year and 9% reported the use of hallucinogens (LSD, mescaline, peyote, shrooms or psilocybin).

Virginia Poison Center

VCU Health

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WHY THE CONCERN ABOUT TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS?

Our brains and bodies are still growing and developing into our mid-twenties. This means that drugs like marijuana affect young people differently than adults. When teens and young adults use marijuana regularly, it can actually change the way their brain works...*permanently*.



Teen marijuana use is linked to:

- ♦ Problems with attention, memory, learning, and a lowered IQ.
- ♦ Poor school performance.
- ♦ Higher risk of developing a substance abuse disorder later in life.
- ♦ Increased risk of developing a psychiatric disorder.
- ♦ Increased risk of suicide.
- ♦ Lung problems and asthma attacks.

Marijuana affects judgment, concentration, reaction time, and coordination in ways that can make youth more likely to get into accidents and to engage in risky behavior.

WHAT CAN PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS DO?

Seek out honest, un-biased information about marijuana and have age-appropriate conversations with children and adolescents. Studies show that this really does have an impact on the decisions they make. Here are 3 great resources to get you started:

[Talk. They Hear You.](#) (SAMHSA)

[Weed Can Wait.](#) (The Prevention Coalition)

[NIDA for Teens: Marijuana](#) (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

BABIES, TODDLERS, YOUNG CHILDREN

The most common childhood marijuana poisonings happen when a child gets into edibles. Edibles are easily confused for regular food and beverage items--like these cannabis gummy candies.

Moreover, most edibles are not meant to be consumed all at once. For example, this chocolate bar edible (image at right) contains enough THC for 12 adult doses. Users are instructed to eat only one small square, but a child would likely eat more than that; perhaps even the entire bar.





CHILDHOOD POISONINGS ON THE RISE

Calls to U.S. poison centers about young children getting into edibles and other marijuana products are on the rise.

Marijuana affects children differently than adults. Kids who consume edibles often need to be cared for in a hospital due to the severity of their symptoms, which can include:

- Hallucinations, confusion
- Extreme sleepiness or inability to stay awake.
- Difficulty walking, moving, or speaking.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Dangerous changes in heart rate.

It is important to keep marijuana, marijuana concentrates, and edibles stored out of the sight and reach of children--just like medicine or other harmful products. Don't keep them anywhere near regular food and drink. Use an opaque container for storage that locks if possible. Avoid using marijuana and marijuana products in the presence of young children.



PREGNANCY

Marijuana use by mothers during pregnancy or while nursing may be linked to lifelong problems with attention, memory, problem-solving skills, and behavior problems in their children.

WHO CAN HELP? If you think a child has been exposed to marijuana, or if anyone under the influence of marijuana is experiencing unwanted health effects, call the Virginia Poison Center right away: **1-800-222-1222**. Specially trained nurses and doctors are standing by day or night to help. The advice is free and confidential.

References and Resources

- [The American Association of Poison Control Centers](#)
- NIH News report: [Marijuana use at historic highs among college-age adults](#)
- NIH News report: [Cannabis use may be associated with suicidality in young adults](#)
- Monitoring the Future: [National Survey Results on Drug Use 2023 Overview](#)
- [Myth or Fact: Marijuana is stronger these days](#). National Institute on Drug Abuse
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: [Marijuana](#)
- [Talk. They Hear You](#). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- [Weed Can Wait](#)