



Public Health Brief

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“This Ain’t Your Mother’s Marijuana”: Marijuana Use and the Developing Brain

The U.S. Surgeon General has released an advisory on the health risks of marijuana use in adolescence and during pregnancy. (<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html>) The concerns:

- Increase in access
- Increase in potency
- Decreased perception of risk
- Increased use during adolescence and pregnancy

Marijuana and its related products are widely available in multiple forms to eat, drink, smoke, and/or vape. They bind to receptors in the brain to produce euphoria, intoxication, and memory and motor impairments, with impacts on decision making, mental health, response to stress, and educational achievement. Use increases the risk of addiction and misuse of other substances. The risks of negative consequences increase with exposure to high concentrations of THC and younger age of initiation.

Marijuana is now legal in many states, although with age restrictions. However, along with the increase in availability comes increased and variable concentrations of THC, the active ingredient. The THC concentration in commonly cultivated marijuana plants has increased three-fold between 1995 and 2014. Marijuana sold in dispensaries in some states has average concentrations of THC



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between 17.7% and 23.2%, with concentrated products such as dabs and waxes potentially containing 23.7% to 75.9% THC.

Marijuana Use during Pregnancy

The use of marijuana during pregnancy is rising at alarming rates. Many retail dispensaries recommend marijuana to pregnant women for morning sickness. Marijuana use in pregnancy can affect the developing brain of the fetus. After delivery, THC can be found in breast milk, and may result in hyperactivity and poor cognitive function. No one should smoke marijuana – or tobacco – around a baby.

Marijuana Use during Adolescence

Marijuana is commonly used by adolescents, second only to alcohol. High school students have a false and dangerous perception of safety of regular marijuana use, buying into the argument, “If it is legal, how can it be harmful?” The human brain continues to develop from before birth into the mid-20s and is vulnerable to the effects of marijuana products. Frequent use during adolescence is associated with brain changes resulting in attention deficits, memory loss, poor decision making, and lack of motivation. Chronic use is linked to declines in IQ and school performance that jeopardizes professional and social achievements and life satisfaction, with increased school absence and drop-out, as well as suicide attempts. Early frequent use of high potency products is linked to early onset of psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.

You Can – and Need to – Take Action!

No amount of marijuana use during pregnancy or adolescence is known to be safe. The safest choice for pregnant women and adolescents is not to use marijuana. Pregnant women and youth – AND THOSE WHO LOVE THEM – **YOU** – need the facts and resources to support healthy decisions. This includes family members, neighbors, school personnel, healthcare professionals, and local leaders.

YOU HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY FOR A HEALTHY NEXT GENERATION



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Information for Parents and Parents-to-be:

You have an important role to play for a healthy next generation.

- Review the [facts](#) to understand the risks associated with marijuana use during pregnancy.
- Check out these [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about marijuana use and pregnancy.
- Learn about [marijuana safety for children and pregnant and breastfeeding women](#).
- Start a conversation with your kids: Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know.
- Keep your adolescent from using marijuana and other drugs: [Keeping Youth Drug Free - PDF](#).
- Watch the [Message to Parents from NIH/NIDA](#)

Information for Youth:

You have an important role to play for a healthy next generation.

- Want to know how marijuana affects brain development? [Get the facts](#).
- Learn key techniques on how to resist peer pressure: [Above the Influence](#)
- Learn how to help friends stop using marijuana with Letter to Teens
- Get around-the-clock free advice and referrals: [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration \(SAMHSA\) National Helpline](#) (1-800-662-HELP (4357)).

Information for Communities:

You have an important role to play for a healthy next generation.

- Learn how communities and schools can act: [Preventing Marijuana Use among Youth & Young Adults](#).
- Find key messages for communities at www.samhsa.gov/marijuana.
- Get training and educational resources for your community: [Prevention Technology Transfer Centers](#).

: Information for Health Professionals:

You have an important role to play for a healthy next generation.

- Learn how you can integrate marijuana education into prenatal care visits: [Marijuana Pregnancy & Breastfeeding Guidance - PDF](#).
- Get advice on talking with adolescents and parents about marijuana use from the American Academy of Pediatrics [guidance for clinicians](#)
- Read the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists position on Marijuana use during pregnancy and lactation](#)



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