



Cannabis Information for Health Care Providers

It is legal for adults 21 or older to possess, consume and cultivate cannabis in California. Sale of cannabis from licensed retail outlets will become legal January 1, 2018. If you are 18 or older, you can use cannabis if you have a current qualifying physician's recommendation or a valid county-issued medical marijuana identification card. However, cannabis is not recommended for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, or who plan to become pregnant. Additionally, regular cannabis use by youth can result in intermediate and long-term health impacts. Here are recommendations from professional organizations serving pregnant women, their infants, and children, as well as key data and information from scientific research on the health risks associated with cannabis use.



Using Cannabis During Pregnancy is Not Recommended

- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend women who are pregnant or contemplating pregnancy should be encouraged to discontinue use of cannabis.¹
- If a pregnant patient is already using cannabis for medicinal purposes, use should be discontinued in favor of an alternative treatment shown to be safe during pregnancy.²
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends infants not be exposed to cannabis, given research demonstrating it may have negative effects on health and brain development.³

- Possible negative effects of using cannabis during pregnancy include fetal growth restriction and low birth weight.²
- Research has demonstrated that cannabis use may increase the chance of having a stillbirth.^{4,5}
- Evidence indicates cannabis use during pregnancy, or while breastfeeding, can affect infant neurodevelopment.^{6,7}

Using Cannabis While Breastfeeding is Not Recommended

- The American Academy of Pediatrics and other professional organizations recommend that women do not use cannabis while breastfeeding.^{3,8}
- Regardless of the method of consumption (smoking, vaping, eating, or drinking), the active ingredient in cannabis, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), is present in the breast milk of women who use cannabis and is transmitted to infants who nurse.^{9,10}
- Infants exposed to breast milk that contains THC may have trouble nursing because of sedation, reduced muscular tone, and poor sucking ability.¹¹

How Cannabis Affects Children and Youth

- Secondhand smoke from cannabis products entering the lungs of infants and children contains THC as well as many of the same chemicals as tobacco smoke.¹⁸
- The way cannabis plants are grown has changed over the past few decades. Many plants now contain higher amounts of THC.^{19,20} The higher the THC content, the stronger the effects on your brain and behavior.²¹
- Since the brain is still developing into the mid-20s, using cannabis during adolescence can negatively affect the developing brain, leading to short-term and long-term consequences. Such consequences may jeopardize educational, professional, and social achievements.
- Research shows that youth who use cannabis before age 18, or use cannabis regularly, may be at higher risk of:
 - Skipping classes¹²
 - Lower grades and an increased risk of dropping out of school^{13,14}
 - Unemployment or having less fulfilling jobs later in life¹⁵
- Cannabis use in adolescence can lead to addiction and increase the risk of use or abuse of other substances and illegal drugs.^{16,17}

Cannabis Use May Affect Youth Mental Health

- Regular cannabis use has been linked to anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and death by suicide, especially for teens with a family history of mental illness.^{22,23,24}
- Although rare, cannabis use also increases the risk of schizophrenia and other psychoses, with the highest risk among those who use cannabis more frequently.²⁵

Communicate with Your Patients

- It is important to ask your patients about their cannabis use and provide information, without judgment, about safety concerns and referral for treatment if needed.
 - More than 1 in 10 pregnant and non-pregnant women reported using cannabis in the past 12 months.²⁶
 - In 2016, less than 1 in 5 high school students in California reported using cannabis in the past 30 days.²⁷
 - Both groups reported beliefs that there is slight or no risk of harm from using cannabis once or twice a week.
- As acceptance of cannabis use increases, it is important to counsel pregnant women on the potential medical consequences of use during pregnancy.^{28,29}



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