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Cannabis Information for Health Care Providers

Research shows that cannabis (marijuana, weed, pot, etc.) use during pregnancy or breastfeeding can have negative health impacts on developing fetuses and infants. There are also harmful impacts on the health and well-being of youth when cannabis is consumed during adolescence. 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.¹
- 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.^{3,4}
- Evidence indicates cannabis use during pregnancy,

or while breastfeeding, can affect infant neurodevelopment.^{5,6}

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.^{7,8}
- 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

- 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.¹²
- 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.^{13,14}

- The way cannabis plants are grown has changed over the past few decades. Many plants now contain higher amounts of THC. The higher the THC content, the stronger the effects on your brain and behavior.^{15,16,17}
- 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.¹⁸
- Research shows that youth who use cannabis before age 18, or use cannabis regularly, may be at higher risk of:
 - Skipping classes¹⁹
 - Lower grades and an increased risk of dropping out of school^{20,21}
 - Unemployment or having less fulfilling jobs later in life^{21,22}
- Cannabis use in adolescence can lead to addiction and increase the risk of use or abuse of other substances and illegal drugs.^{20,23}

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.^{24,25,26}
- Although rare, cannabis use also increases the risk of schizophrenia and other psychoses, with the highest risk among those who use cannabis more frequently.^{27,28}

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.²⁹
- In 2016, less than 1 in 5 high school students in California reported using cannabis in the past 30 days.³⁰
- Both groups reported beliefs that there is slight or no risk of harm from using cannabis once or twice a week.^{31,32}
- As acceptance of cannabis use increases, it is important to counsel pregnant women on the potential medical consequences of use during pregnancy.^{33,34}



 **LET'S TALK CANNABIS**

 <http://bit.do/letstalkcannabis>

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Under California law, adults 21 or older can use, carry, and grow cannabis (marijuana, weed, pot, etc.). Buying cannabis (without a valid physician's recommendation or a county-issued medical marijuana identification card) will become legal under California law for adults 21 or older on January 1, 2018. Use of medicinal cannabis is legal under California law if you have a valid physician's recommendation or a valid county-issued medical marijuana identification card. To buy medicinal cannabis, you must be 18 or older and have either a valid physician's recommendation, a valid county-issued medical marijuana identification card, or be a Primary Caregiver as defined in Health and Safety Code Section 11362.7(d) or 11362.5(e), with a valid physician's recommendation for the patient. In addition, consistent with the Compassionate Use Act, you may possess or cultivate any amount that is reasonably related to your current medical needs. The new California law, known as the Medicinal and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act³⁵, includes information about where you can use cannabis, how much you can possess, and the penalties for illegal use. For more information, visit: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=20170180SB94.

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