



Talking to Pregnant & Breastfeeding Women about Cannabis

Marijuana (cannabis) is now legal for adults over 21 in California, but this does not mean it is safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Until more information about the potential harm is available, it is recommended that women stop using cannabis while pregnant or breastfeeding. Health care providers and public health professionals are encouraged to discuss marijuana use and potential safer alternatives. To learn more about the health risks among pregnant and breastfeeding women, see the [Let's Talk Cannabis fact sheets for pregnant and breastfeeding women](#) and [health care providers](#). Here are some discussion points about marijuana and ways to support healthy decision-making.

Cannabis can be harmful:

- We don't know enough about cannabis to tell you that it is safe while pregnant, nursing, or when trying to have a baby. More studies about the risks of cannabis are needed, but enough research shows concerning health effects to recommend not using during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Prenatal cannabis use may impair fetal growth and brain development. It may make it hard for your child to pay attention and learn in school. No matter how it is used (e.g., vaping, eating, smoking, etc.), the THC in cannabis passes to your baby through the placenta and breastmilk.



Medicinal Cannabis:

- The decision to continue medicinal cannabis use (as with any medication) during pregnancy, and/or breastfeeding is based on whether the benefits of the treatment outweigh the risks to the baby. If you

are using medicinal cannabis, and you are currently pregnant, breastfeeding, or may become pregnant, you should discuss the benefits, risks, and alternatives with your health care provider.

Take a Break from Cannabis:

- Even if you used cannabis before you knew you were pregnant, stop now to protect your baby's health. If you are unable to stop using cannabis completely, try using less and less often. If you need help to stop or to use less cannabis, visit [SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) in English and Spanish. 24 hours a day, seven days a week.





Parenting and Cannabis:

- Avoid exposing your child to smoke of any kind. Burning cannabis “flowers” or plant material releases toxic chemicals into the air and inhaling smoke allows toxins to affect all organs in the body. Secondhand smoke from cannabis has many of the same cancer-causing chemicals as smoke from tobacco. A smoke-free environment is safest and healthiest. Do not allow any type of smoking in your home or around your baby or other children.
- Store cannabis safely, as it can be very dangerous if eaten by children or pets.
- Be attentive to your child’s needs, and be sure that there is always someone sober available to take care of the child. Being high while caring for a baby is not safe. Do not let anyone who is high take care of your baby.
- It is recommended that infants sleep in the parents’ room but on a separate surface designed for infants. Bed-sharing is particularly risky if you are high. And never fall asleep with your baby on a couch or armchair, it is extremely dangerous.
- It is not safe to drive a car while high. Do not let your baby ride in a car if the driver is high.
- Have sober adults take responsibility for your children if you are using any impairing substance, including cannabis.

Breastfeeding and Cannabis:

- Breastfeeding is important for your baby. It’s best to stop using cannabis but if you can’t, continue to breastfeed while making every effort to reduce the amount of cannabis consumed, whether smoked, vaped or eaten. When a breastfeeding mother uses cannabis, THC passes into her breast milk and is concentrated at higher levels than in her plasma (blood). Then, THC passes to the infant when feeding.
- Because THC is stored in body fat, it can stay in your body for a long time. This means that “pumping and dumping” your breast milk will not work the same way it does with alcohol. Alcohol is not stored in fat so it leaves the body faster.
- A mother’s ability to nurse and care for her child may be compromised because cannabis can affect her mood and judgment.



Ask an Expert:

- If you would like to speak to someone about possible effects of cannabis when planning a pregnancy, during pregnancy, or while breastfeeding, contact MotherToBaby. MotherToBaby experts are available to provide information and answer your questions in English or Spanish, call 1-866-626-6847 or text 1-855-999-3525. You can also visit Mother to Baby: <http://mothertobaby.org> where you can chat online or email an expert. The free and confidential service is available Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm (PST).



Additional Information:

- For more information about the effects of cannabis on the brain and how to reduce harms associated with cannabis, visit: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/how-does-marijuana-produce-its-effects>
- Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine. Clinical Protocol #21: Guidelines for Breastfeeding and Substance Use or Substance Use Disorder, Revised 2015
- American Academy of Pediatrics. Policy Statement: Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Committee Opinion No.722: Cannabis Use During Pregnancy and Lactation.
- Comprehensive Perinatal Services Steps to Take Program Guidelines For Enhanced Health Education, Nutrition and Psychosocial Services (Pages 346 or NUTR 141 through Pages 387 or NUTR 182)
- California Infant Feeding Guide
- WIC Feeding My Baby materials: A Guide to Breastfeeding
- LactMed: Drugs and Lactation Database