

Surgeon general: Marijuana unsafe during adolescence, pregnancy

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The U.S. surgeon general issued a call to action warning adolescents and pregnant women about the dangers of marijuana.

The advisory comes as marijuana becomes more potent and more ubiquitous, and echoes AAP guidance that both groups avoid using it. Surgeon General Vice Adm. Jerome Adams, M.D., M.P.H, called on clinicians to ask patients in these groups about marijuana use and educate them about the risks.

“This advisory is intended to raise awareness of the known and potential harms to developing brains, posed by the increasing availability of highly potent marijuana in multiple, concentrated forms,” Dr. Adams [wrote in the advisory](#). “These harms are costly to individuals and to our society, impacting mental health and educational achievement and raising the risks of addiction and misuse of other substances.”

Over the years, marijuana’s psychoactive chemical, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), has become more concentrated. From 1995 to 2014, the average THC concentrations in marijuana plants rose from 4% to 12%. In some states, marijuana available in dispensaries has average THC concentrations of up to 23%, according to the report. It also is used in a variety of forms including [cannabis concentrates](#), which are cannabis plant extracts that can contain as much as 76% THC.

As THC concentrations rise, so too do the risks of addiction, anxiety, paranoia and psychosis, the report says.

About 9.2 million youths ages 12-25 years reported recent marijuana use in 2017, and fewer youths are viewing the drug as harmful, according to the report. But it can potentially impact the development of brain centers that control attention, memory and decision-making and lead to use of other substances.

Marijuana also may impact brain development in a fetus and should not be used by pregnant women, according to the advisory. It notes that exposure via breastmilk and secondhand smoke also can harm children.

“Further research is needed to understand all the impacts of THC on the developing brain, but we know enough now to warrant concern and action,” Dr. Adams wrote. “Everyone has a role in protecting our young people from the risks of marijuana.”

Resources

- [AAP policy "The Impact of Marijuana Policies on Youth: Clinical, Research, and Legal Update"](#)

- [AAP clinical report, "Counseling Parents and Teens About Marijuana Use in the Era of Legalization of Marijuana"](#)
- [AAP clinical report "Marijuana Use During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Implications for Neonatal and Childhood Outcomes"](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org about marijuana](#)
- [Pediatrics research collection on marijuana](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [Marijuana facts from the National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens](#)
- [AAP Substance Use Screening and Intervention Implementation Guide](#)
- [AAP Voices blog on pediatricians' role in preventing substance use](#)
- [Bright Futures guidance on screening for prenatal substance exposure](#)
- [EQIPP: Substance Use - Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral to Treatment online course](#)

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