

## Cannabis: What parents need to know

Cannabis is the most commonly used drug by Canadians between 15 and 24 years old. Because cannabis is now legal in Canada, some young people may think it is harmless. But for many young people, there are serious risks to using cannabis. One of every 6 youth who experiments with cannabis will develop problematic use.

Cannabis products are now 2 to 4 times stronger than they were in the 1970s. There are also more ways to use cannabis, including edibles, vaping, or smoking.

### Is there a difference between inhaling and ingesting cannabis?

Cannabis is usually inhaled by smoking (joint, blunt, pipe, bong) or vaping (e-cigarette). Cannabis can also be ingested as edibles (candies, baked goods, beverages) or extracts (oils, capsules).

Some teens believe that vaping or ingesting is safer than smoking, but:

- Edibles can have delayed and unpredictable effects. This can be especially dangerous for inexperienced users.
- Extracts like oils and capsules often have higher concentration levels of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), which is the compound in cannabis that makes you high.
- Vaping cannabis products has recently been linked to vaping-associated lung illnesses.

### What are the short-term effects of cannabis?

Short-term effects can include:

- a sense of euphoria, feeling intense happiness and relaxation,
- difficulty thinking and problem solving,

- short-term memory loss,
- lack of coordination,
- distorted perception,
- hunger,
- lightheadedness or drowsiness, and
- paranoia and/or anxiety.

Cannabis also affects judgment and coordination, so people using cannabis are more likely to be injured.

You should **never** use cannabis before or while driving.

## What are the long-term effects of cannabis use?

A young person's brain continues to develop into their early 20s, and using cannabis can affect brain development. Using cannabis regularly can trigger damage to the brain that can't be reversed.

Long-term, regular cannabis use has been associated with a variety of problems and risky behaviours.

### **Mental health**

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychotic illnesses (losing touch with reality)

### **School performance**

- Difficulty concentrating, remembering things, and solving problems
- Falling behind in class
- Grades dropping
- Dropping out of school

### **Substance abuse**

- Heavy drinking
- Cigarette smoking

## Lung disease

- Chronic bronchitis and emphysema

Over the past few years, experts have noticed **physical withdrawal symptoms** from quitting cannabis, meaning that cannabis can lead to more than just psychological addiction.

## How do I know if my teen is using cannabis?

**Ask them.** Talk about cannabis even if you don't think they are using. Teens who feel they can talk to their parents are more likely to share important information about where they're going, what they're doing and who they're with. Keep communication lines open with your teen.

**If your teen shows any of these signs, they may be using cannabis:**

- Spends less time with friends and family, or has a recent change in friends
- Seems moodier
- Skips classes or their grades are slipping
- Loses interest in hobbies/sports
- Has red or glassy eyes, at times
- Smells like cannabis (skunky)
- Owns pipes, bongs, rolling papers, etc.
- Suffers regular injuries

## What can I do if my teen is using cannabis?

- Inform yourself about why they may be using cannabis. Some teens use cannabis to cope with certain pressures in their lives, such as exams, relationships, or stress. There could be an underlying issue that needs attention.
- Let your teen know that you care and that you want to make sure that they have correct and up-to-date information about the risks of using cannabis and the

problems it can cause.

- Have an open discussion about the risks of cannabis on their developing brain.
- Consult the resources on how to have the cannabis talk with your teen.
- Make sure they understand the dangers of driving or working after or while using cannabis.
- A health professional like your family doctor or paediatrician can help as well.

## Is it OK for parents to use cannabis?

If you use any form of cannabis, keep it well out of reach of children. Younger children can accidentally ingest cannabis or cannabis-infused products that look like desserts or candy. Unintentional ingestion can cause overdose symptoms like severe drowsiness and breathing problems. If this happens, your child needs urgent medical care and may need to be hospitalized.

Don't use cannabis while supervising children. It may impair your judgement and focus.

Doctors recommend that you not use cannabis if pregnant. Studies show that cannabis use during pregnancy can harm your baby.

## Additional resources

- Cannabis in Canada: Get the facts (Health Canada)  
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/campaigns/cannabis.html>)
- Talking to youth about cannabis (TVO - The Agenda)  
(<https://www.tv.o.org/video/talking-to-youth-about-cannabis>)
- Cannabis Talk Kit: Know How To Talk With Your Teen (Drug Free Kids Canada)  
([https://www.drugfreekidsCanada.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Cannabis-Talk-Kit\\_EN.pdf](https://www.drugfreekidsCanada.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Cannabis-Talk-Kit_EN.pdf))
- Cannabis Products, Including Edibles (Drug Free Kids Canada)  
([https://www.drugfreekidsCanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/DFK\\_Info\\_Cannabis\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.drugfreekidsCanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/DFK_Info_Cannabis_FINAL.pdf))

- How to talk with youth about cannabis (Cannabis Knowledge Exchange Hub, CAMH)  
(<http://cannabisknowledgehub.com/resources/how-to-talk-with-youth-about-cannabis-1.html>)
- Cannabis use by teens (video by NOSM University medical students)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT-bYDvfGRk>)
- Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)  
(<https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---reports-and-books---research/canadas-lower-risk-guidelines-cannabis-pdf.pdf>)
- Cannabis: Inhaling vs. Ingesting (Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction)  
([https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-06/CCSA-Cannabis-Inhaling-Ingesting-Risks-Infographic-2019-en\\_1.pdf](https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-06/CCSA-Cannabis-Inhaling-Ingesting-Risks-Infographic-2019-en_1.pdf))
- Pot + Driving (Canadian Public Health Association)  
(<https://www.cpha.ca/pot-driving>)
- Cannabis (TeenMentalHealth.org)  
(<http://teenmentalhealth.org/cannabis/>)
- Let's Talk about Ujarak: a Cannabis Harm Reduction Toolkit (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, available in 6 languages)  
(<https://www.pauktuutit.ca/health/lets-talk-about-ujarak/>)
- Weed Out The Risk: An Anti-crash Course on Cannabis and Driving (Springboard)  
(<https://wotr.ca/>)

## Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Adolescent Health Committee
- Cannabis Project Advisory Group



© 2024 – Canadian Paediatric Society  
[cps.ca/en/](https://cps.ca/en/) – [info@cps.ca](mailto:info@cps.ca)

Available at [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)