

Cannabis

background information for educators

What is cannabis?

- Also known as: Marijuana, Pot, Ganja, Dope, Bud, Weed, Skunk, Grass, Herb, Mary Jane, Wax, Reefer, Dabs, Hash.
- Cannabis is a psychoactive drug that can be used for recreational or medical purposes
- The chemicals in cannabis come from the Cannabis sativa plant.
- Cannabis contains delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, which causes intoxication and is responsible for the 'high' produced by cannabis. THC affects the way the brain and body respond to the substance.
- Cannabidiol (CBD) is another chemical substance of cannabis. CBD does not produce a high or intoxication effects like THC and is being studied for possible therapeutic uses. It can be prescribed by health care professionals.

Methods of consumption



Smoking

Inhaling smoke produced by burning cannabis:

- **Joint:** Dried cannabis rolled in cigarette paper
- **Spliff:** Cannabis mixed with tobacco and rolled in cigarette paper
- **Blunt:** Dried cannabis rolled in cigar paper
- **Water pipe or bong:** Smoke is drawn through water before inhalation



Vapourizing/Vaping

- Cannabis product or by-product is heated until it turns into vapour (not smoke) and is inhaled. It can include vapourizing dried cannabis or vaping cannabis liquid with a vaping device.



Dabbing

- Solid or semi-solid form of cannabis extract is heated at high temperatures, producing a vapour that is inhaled. Accessories used for this method include dab pens.



Eating/drinking

- Edible cannabis are foods and drinks containing chemical components of cannabis (dried or extract). For example: brownies, chocolates, candies, butters, drinks.



Topical

- Oils, balms, creams, and lotions with cannabidiol that is intended for direct application to the skin, nails, and hair. Topicals may provide localized pain relief and anti-inflammatory effects.

Why is youth cannabis use a concern?



Brain development

- The brain is not fully developed until the age of 25 and early initiation of cannabis use (before the age of 15) can negatively affect brain development and function.
- Evidence suggests that earlier and more frequent (daily or weekly) cannabis use increases the risk in developing problem cannabis use (e.g. cannabis use disorder and cannabis dependence).



Respiratory health

- Evidence suggests that long-term cannabis smoking is associated with worsening respiratory symptoms and more frequent episodes of respiratory illnesses (e.g., bronchitis).



Injury and overconsumption

- Cannabis use may impair attention, reaction, and cognition which are all critical for driving and operating machinery.
- Cannabis use is associated with an increased risk of motor vehicle crashes.
- Cannabis edibles may be associated with an increased risk of overconsumption as there is a delay in experiencing the desired effects.

Reference: [Cannabis Resource Series - Health Canada](#)

Cannabis and stress

A common myth is that cannabis can help to manage stress. Instead, it can induce fear, anxiety, and panic.



Some healthier ways to cope with stress include:



- Breathing exercises (meditation, yoga, etc.)
- Exercising
- Seeking support for mental health and well-being
- Healthy eating
- Enjoying hobbies
- Spending quality time with friends and family
- Getting enough sleep (9-11 hours /night for 5–13-year-olds, and 8-10 hours /night for 14-17 year-olds)

References:

[Stress Management and Coping - School Mental Health Ontario](#)

[Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth \(ages 5-17 years\) - Health Canada](#)

Health effects of cannabis use

People's response to cannabis differs from one person to another. Cannabis use can cause immediate and long-term effects on the body and brain, and impair a person's ability to conduct some daily activities.

Immediate effects

- The effects of **smoking and vaping** cannabis can begin seconds to minutes after inhaling, then peak within 30 minutes, and last up to 6 hours, with some effects lasting as long as 24 hours.
- Effects of **ingesting** cannabis can begin from 30 minutes to 2 hours after consuming, and last up to 12 hours, with some effects lasting as long as 24 hours.

These **immediate/short-term effects** include:

- Feeling high/happy (euphoria)
- Body tremors
- Confusion
- Sleepiness (fatigue)
- Anxiety, fear or panic
- Decreased reaction time and concentration
- Relaxed
- Distorted senses (sight, sounds, time, touch)
- Increased sociability
- Can trigger psychotic episodes (paranoia, delusions, hallucinations)
- Damaged blood vessels caused by the smoke
- Decreased blood pressure which can lead to passing out or fainting

Long term effects

- Long-term effects develop gradually with daily or near-daily use that continues over weeks, months, or years.
- The effects can last from several days to many months after cannabis use has stopped.

These **long-term effects** include:

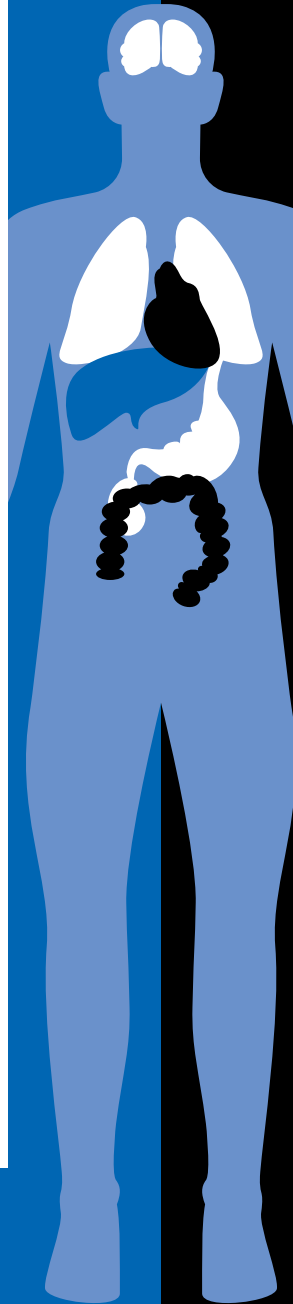
- Increased risk of problematic use (e.g. cannabis dependence) which may lead to addiction.
- Increased risk of developing schizophrenia and other psychoses. ([Health Canada](#))

Other **long-term effects** of smoking cannabis include:

- Increased risk of lung infections
- Breathing problems
- Long-term cough,
- Mucous build-up in the throat and chest
- Bronchitis

Someone addicted to cannabis can **experience withdrawal symptoms** when stopped

- Difficulty sleeping
- Depressed mood
- Increased anxiety, among other effects ([Health Canada](#))



References:

[Cannabis Health Effects Fact Sheet - Health Canada](#)
[Is cannabis safe to use? Facts for youth aged 13–17 - Health Canada](#)

Why youth might use cannabis

- To fit in
- To cope with stress
- To relieve their boredom
- To improve or intensify mood

Reference:

[Cannabis Facts for 13-17 years of age - Health Canada](#)



Did you know?

The legalities of cannabis

- In October 2018, Canada legalized cannabis for recreational use.
- The intent of legalization and regulation was to adopt a public health approach to minimize the harms posed by cannabis use, penalize operations outside the legal market, decrease the burden on the criminal justice system, and enhance awareness of health risks associated with use.
- **In Ontario:**
 - The minimum age is 19 to purchase, use, and possess and grow cannabis.
 - It is prohibited to smoke or vape on school and child care properties, and within 20 metres of any point on the perimeter of the facility.
- **In Peel:**
 - In Peel, smoking or vaping of any substance is banned in outdoor public places, municipal properties and construction sites.
 - Smoking or vaping of any substance is prohibited within 9 metres of indoor public spaces and workplaces.



References:

[Cannabis Legalization and Regulation - Government of Canada](#)

[No Smoking and Vaping in Outdoor Public Places and Workplaces By-law 49-2019](#)

[Smoke-Free Ontario Act 2017](#)

Myths and facts

Myth	Fact
"It isn't addictive."	Cannabis has the same addictive potential range as alcohol. Continued, frequent use can result in tolerance build-up, dependency, and addiction. Youth under the age of 25 are especially vulnerable because their brains are in development. (Health Canada)
"It is harmless because it's natural."	Cannabis contains hundreds of chemical compounds that negatively affect brain development and function. The brain is not fully developed until the age of 25 and introducing cannabis into the body negatively affects mental health and physical health.
"I heard that cannabis is prescribed to patients for medical purposes so it must be safe."	Medical cannabis is prescribed by a health care professional for the purpose of treating and managing illness or pain, with access regulated by the government. Medical cannabis generally has a higher cannabidiol (CBD) content and lower THC content.
"Cannabis was legalized so it means that it is not harmful to people."	Canada's legalization of cannabis is meant to protect public safety, penalize operations outside the legal market, decrease the burden on the criminal justice system and enhance awareness of health risks associated with use. Legalization of cannabis does not mean that it is not harmful.

Statistics on cannabis use

- [Peel Public Health: Health Status Data](#) - Region of Peel
- [Ontario Student Drug Use and Mental Health Survey \(OSDUHS\)](#) - CAMH

Related resources and supports

- [About Cannabis](#) - Canada.ca
- [Region of Peel - Alcohol, tobacco, and other substances](#) - Region of Peel
- [Cannabis: What Educators Need to Know](#) - CAMH
- [A Cannabis Communication Guide for Youth Allies](#) - CCSA
- [Access to Mental Health Services for Children and Youth in Peel](#) - WhereToStart.ca
- [Cannabis: Important things to know](#) - Kids Help Phone