

Health Risks of Cannabis Consumption



Pursuant to Virginia Code Section 4.1-604.32, the Virginia Cannabis Control Authority (CCA) has prepared this informational resource on health risks of cannabis consumption. The CCA does not endorse the consumption of recreational cannabis.

Cannabis use may affect personal health through the inhalation of smoke, product contamination, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol concentration and its psychoactive properties, and/or the amount of cannabis product consumed. The age of first use of cannabis, the frequency of cannabis use, and whether other substances are used at the same time as cannabis are also factors that impact health. Health risks associated with cannabis use include the following:

Mental Health

BRAIN FUNCTION AND MOOD

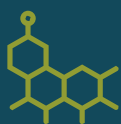
Cannabis use can immediately affect brain functions. If you use cannabis, you may experience impaired motor coordination, euphoria, anxiety and panic attacks, impaired judgment, and the sensation of slowed time. Although these symptoms can be short-term and mild, cannabis users may see negative long-term health effects, as well. Long-term cannabis users tend to have increased depressive episodes, increased anxiety, and decreased motivation. In addition to negative effects on mood, THC can increase paranoia and reduce working memory capacity. You are more likely to develop mental health disorders over time, including schizophrenia, if you use cannabis more often or begin cannabis use at an earlier age.



CANNABIS USE DISORDER (CUD)

Frequent exposure to cannabis increases the risk of developing CUD over time. The following are some signs of cannabis use disorder:

- Using more cannabis than intended
- Trying to quit cannabis use but being unable to do so
- Craving cannabis
- Using cannabis even though it causes problems at home, school, or work
- Giving up important activities with friends or family to use cannabis
- Continuing to use cannabis despite physical or psychological problems apparently triggered by its use
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when stopping cannabis use



Increased potency of cannabis over recent decades may be partly responsible for the rise in CUD diagnoses. Although the rate of CUD has increased over recent decades, CUD remains widely untreated. Consult with a doctor to learn about diagnosis and treatment options if any signs of CUD apply to you. For more information on CUD, read the CCA's factsheet: [Cannabis Use Disorder](#).

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Physical Health

LUNG AND HEART HEALTH

Cannabis use poses several risks to lung and heart functions. If you smoke cannabis, you are more likely to experience short- or long-term breathing symptoms, including bronchitis, wheezing, and cough. Cannabis smoke can also lead to serious lung diseases and airway obstruction if cannabis is inhaled heavily over several years. Cannabis use is associated with several heart health issues, including irregular heartbeat, extra heartbeats, and rapid heart rate. Reducing or eliminating cannabis use often allows the body to recover from physical health issues. You should consult your healthcare provider if you show signs of lung or heart issues after cannabis use.



FOODBORNE ILLNESS OR FOOD POISONING

Edibles are food- or beverage-based products containing cannabis. If you consume edibles, you should be aware of the potential for foodborne illness and food safety risks of non-cannabis ingredients. Unregulated or illicit THC-concentrated cannabis oils could potentially have concentrated amounts of contaminants if the cannabis plant is exposed to harms such as metals, pesticides, molds, fungi, mites, or microbial pathogens. Storage at the production facility or consumer's home can affect the potency, quality, and safety of an edible product. Because the onset of an edible's effects is later than when cannabis is inhaled, people may consume more than they should. This can lead to food poisoning from consuming too much product too quickly.

PREGNANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Cannabis use has the potential to adversely affect maternal, fetal, and childhood development. Cannabis use during pregnancy can increase a person's risk of anemia. Exposure to cannabis in the womb could lead to restricted fetal growth, smaller weight and head circumference, greater stress in newborns, and impulsivity in infants and children. It is best to avoid cannabis use if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding. For more information on cannabis and pregnancy, read the CCA's factsheet: [Cannabis and Pregnancy](#).



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Populations at Greater Risk



YOUTH

Youth who use cannabis are at risk of negatively affecting their brain development. If you use cannabis during adolescence, you may experience negative effects on intelligence and cognitive function. Cannabis use during adolescence can impair the development of the prefrontal cortex, leading to negative effects on decision making, planning, and impulse control. Early cannabis use can also impact the areas of the brain responsible for coordination, regulating memory, and coping with stress and anxiety. Adolescents who begin using cannabis from an early age and continue to regularly use cannabis are also at risk of several behavioral issues, including problematic cannabis use in the future, delinquency, lower educational achievement, and risky sexual behavior.

OLDER ADULTS

Age and declines in organ functions may make older adults more susceptible to experiencing adverse effects after cannabis use. Cannabis consumption among older adults could lead to greater risk for cognitive impairment, falls related to low blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, and drug interactions.

Operating Motorized Vehicles and Machinery

Driving or operating machinery under the influence of cannabis is illegal and unsafe. Cannabis can affect a person's ability to drive or use machinery safely by slowing reaction time, altering decision making, impairing coordination, and disrupting perception. Driving under the influence of cannabis could put you at an increased risk of crashing. Using multiple substances can further increase impairment and your risk of crashing. For more information on the dangers of cannabis use and driving, read the CCA's factsheet: [Risks and Consequences of Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis](#).



Know Your Personal Risks



This document is a brief, not extensive, list of potential health risks associated with cannabis use. Cannabis use can affect everyone differently. Talk to your healthcare provider to learn more about your personal health risks regarding cannabis use. Please consider these health risks when making an informed decision about cannabis.