



Renfrew County and District Health Unit

"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"



Q: What is cannabis?

A: Cannabis is a plant that contains over 100 different chemicals called cannabinoids. THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is the main mind altering chemical and affects how you act, feel and think. CBD (Cannabidiol) is another chemical, but has little or no psychoactive effects and can even counteract the psychoactive/negative effects of THC.

Q: Is cannabis safe to consume?

A: No drug is without certain risks. To avoid all potential for harm, it is recommended to avoid cannabis. Should you choose to use cannabis always consult your health care provider and refer to [Canada's Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#).

Q: What effect does cannabis have on mental health?

A: High THC content, use before 25 years of age, or a personal or family history of mental health issues increase the risk of dependency and can escalate the development of mental health problems. Daily cannabis use has been associated with an increased risk of experiencing depression and anxiety disorders. Frequent use starting at earlier ages is associated with cognitive and neuropsychological deficits.

Q: Why are adolescents and young adults (less than 25 years of age) especially susceptible to cannabis related mental health risks?

A: Cannabis use can affect areas of the developing brain that are important for cognitive and emotional processes. With increased use, comes increased risk, and initiating use at a younger age (particularly those younger than 16) increases the risk of mental health problems and dependence. If you choose to use cannabis, the health unit recommends starting after 25 years of age when the brain is fully developed.

Q: What common physical effects result from cannabis use?

A: Physical effects of cannabis include: irritated respiratory system, increased appetite, increased heart rate, decreased blood pressure, decreased ability to maintain balance or stability, poor memory, thinking difficulties, distorted perceptions (sights, sounds, time, touch), drowsiness or restlessness, anxiety, red eyes, and dry mouth/throat. **Individual responses to cannabis can differ.**

Q: Does cannabis affect someone's ability to drive?

A: People should not operate a motorized vehicle while under the influence. Cannabis impairs one's ability to drive by negatively impacting reaction time, motor coordination, ability to divide attention, perception, decision making, and short-term memory - all of these are critical for safe driving. Impairment can last, unknowingly, for a long period of time.

Q: Does cannabis use affect pregnancy or breastfeeding?

A: Cannabis use may affect your ability to become pregnant. Cannabis use also causes toxins to be carried through the mother's blood to her fetus, and can result in a baby being born of low birthweight. THC passes into breastmilk and to the baby's fat cells and the brain. They may have effects on the baby's health. It is recommended to

avoid cannabis if you are planning a pregnancy, pregnant or breastfeeding

Q: How can I reduce harms associated to cannabis consumption?

A: Harm is best avoided by not consuming cannabis. Since consuming is a choice, some best practices to keep in mind include:

- ✓ Avoid cannabis if younger than 25 years of age, planning a pregnancy, pregnant, breastfeeding, or at risk for mental health problems.
- ✓ Consult a health care provider, and refer to Canada's Lower Risk Cannabis use Guidelines (CAMH).
- ✓ Avoid "deep inhalation" or "breath-holding", as they increase the amount of toxic material entering the lungs into the body.
- ✓ Reduce how often cannabis is used.
- ✓ High-potency cannabis products (high THC to CBD levels) are more likely to result in harms.
- ✓ Smoking burnt/combusted cannabis can harm the respiratory tract. Choosing other methods like vaporizers or edibles may reduce some risks.
- ✓ Avoid synthetic cannabis products (e.g., K2 or Spice) as it can lead to more severe health problems or even death.

Q: Can you overdose from using cannabis?

A: Yes. While cannabis overdose does not happen in the same way that overdose occurs with opioids or other drugs, overconsumption can cause high levels of anxiety, fear or panic, and psychotic episodes of paranoia, delusions or hallucinations. Hyperemesis, involving uncontrollable vomiting can also occur.

Consuming cannabis that was purchased or received from an unreliable or unregulated source increases the risk for overdose from other substances. Opioids, cocaine, MDMA, LSD, methamphetamine, or other household chemicals have been found in unregulated or "black market" cannabis.

Q: How can I help protect others around me?

A: Some practices to reduce risk to others include:

- ✓ Do not operate vehicles after using cannabis. Dosage, potency, mode of use and tolerance all have an influence on the levels and duration of impairment.
- ✓ Avoid smoking or vaporizing indoors or around children. Secondhand exposure can result in illness for infants and young children, while also affecting alertness, understanding and judgement.
- ✓ Use child-resistant packaging, and keep cannabis locked, out of sight and reach. Control unnecessary exposure to areas where various home-grown plant parts are present.

Q: Is cannabis addictive?

A: Yes. Regular, daily and heavy use can lead to dependence and in extreme cases, addiction in the form of Cannabis Use Disorder. About 1 in 6 teenagers and 1 in 11 adults will develop a cannabis addiction. When someone stops using after regular or heavy consumption, withdrawal symptoms can lead to continued use to offset newly experienced issues including:

- ✓ Irritability.
- ✓ Trouble sleeping.
- ✓ Dysphoria (state of general unhappiness), restlessness, frustration or dissatisfaction.
- ✓ Depression or anxiety.
- ✓ Cravings or changes in appetite and weight loss.

Q: How do edibles differ from inhaled cannabis?

A: The effects of edibles can be delayed up to 2 hours and may last up to 10 hours. After smoking or vaping cannabis, effects are felt almost instantly and may last up to 4 hours. Individual effects to cannabis can differ. Remember, dosage, potency, mode of use and tolerance all have an influence on the levels and duration of impairment.

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