

Did cannabis legalization increase poisonings among children and youth?

The BCIRPU studied whether the legalization of cannabis in Canada impacted the number of children and youth visiting the emergency department (ED) at British Columbia Children's Hospital (BCCH) for cannabis poisoning.

- Jan 2016 to Dec 2018 (Before legalization): **119 cases**
- Jan 2019 to Dec 2021 (After legalization): **185 cases**

Overall, cases increased steadily with a small jump just after legalization, then decreased slightly.

In **2018**, non-medical cannabis was legalized in British Columbia for individuals 19+. Edibles were legalized one year later, in late 2019.


Symptoms of cannabis poisoning can include:

- Vomiting
- Confusion
- Slowed breathing
- Dizziness
- Slurred speech
- Unresponsiveness

Most patients were observed or treated in the ED and discharged.

YOUTH **15** years old The median (middle) age for poisoning.

Most ED visits were from intentional use among youth 14 to 16 years old—in other words, they knew they were using cannabis and used too much.

 Inhalation was the most common way for youth to use cannabis.



Poisonings occurred with cannabis alone or when combined with alcohol, illicit drugs, or medications.



After legalization, males were more likely to use only cannabis, while co-consumption with other substances was more common among females.



After legalization, there were more youth cannabis-only poisonings on weekends compared to before legalization.



over HALF of cannabis poisoning cases in youth happened in the presence of peers.

Parents can talk to their kids about:

- Risk of addiction resulting from frequent or long-term use.
- Risks to physical health, mental health, and brain development.
- How to recognize symptoms of cannabis poisoning.
- Not driving, riding, or using other forms of mobile transportation after consuming cannabis.

YOUNG CHILDREN **3** years old The median age for poisoning.*

**Most cases involved the ingestion of cannabis edibles.*

The number of cannabis-related poisonings among young children were relatively low, but did increase from **4%** before legalization to **12%** after legalization.



Children are vulnerable to poisoning due to their fast metabolism and low body weight.

Families can save a trip to the emergency by:

- Storing cannabis products high up, locked away, and out of reach.
- Avoiding leaving products on the counter or table, or keeping products all in one place.
- Supervising young children when at home or at someone else's home.
- Not referring to edibles as "yummy" — kids like to copy you!