

Marijuana and Your Baby



What is Marijuana?

Marijuana is made from the dried leaves and flowers of the hemp plant *cannabis sativa*. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the substance in hemp which causes people to get “high.” THC is stored in fatty tissue. The brain consists largely of fats. When using marijuana, large amounts of THC will be stored in the brain, impacting cell membrane production. Medical marijuana is the SAME as street marijuana, except street marijuana may be mixed with other components or treated with unknown pesticides. A person using medical marijuana has received a card from the Division of Public and Behavioral Health; a person may also be using legal recreational marijuana purchased from a licensed vendor.

What happens when I use Marijuana?

The effects of marijuana change with the strength, dose, and how much THC is in the hemp. Although THC is the main compound that causes the high, there are also over 60 different compounds which can affect your brain. They can cause feelings of being afraid, fast heart rate and delusions, lasting two to three hours. The effects on your motor control can last longer. THC stays in the body for roughly one week. There is no way to know how much THC you have in your body. Smoking marijuana exposes mother and baby to harmful smoke; using marijuana edibles or vaporized still exposes baby to THC.

How does Marijuana affect pregnancy?

Marijuana can cause problems for a developing baby. Studies have found babies exposed to marijuana weighed less and had smaller head sizes.¹ Being born too small or too early are leading causes of serious health problems and death for infants under one year of age. Early research shows children born to mothers who used marijuana often have trouble concentrating.² This could make school harder for them.

How does Marijuana affect breastfeeding?

Everything a mother eats, drinks, or smokes enters breast milk. If a woman is breastfeeding, THC will be passed to her baby and the baby may experience certain effects of the drug. THC and the other 60+ compounds will enter into the baby’s fat tissue and brain, leading to developmental problems, such as delay in crawling or grasping finger foods. Experts also think early exposure to drugs may lead to early use of experimentation with them.

How does Marijuana affect parenting?

Use of marijuana by parents, even for medical reasons, can affect how they interact with their child. The parent may not be fully aware of the infant’s basic needs such as signs of hunger, needing a diaper change or wanting to be cuddled. Times to play Peek-A-Boo or reading to their baby may be missed. These activities are an important way children learn about the world around them.

It is strongly advised marijuana not be mixed with pregnancy, breastfeeding or parenting. The American Academy of Pediatrics lists marijuana as a drug which is very harmful to infants.³

¹ E.E. Hatch and M.B. Bracken, “Effect of Marijuana Use in Pregnancy on Fetal Growth,” America Journal of Epidemiology 124 (1986): 986-993

² N. L. Day et al., “Effect of Prenatal Marijuana Exposure on the Cognitive Development of Offspring at Age Three,” Neurotoxicology and Teratology 16 (1994): 169–175

³ The American Academy of Pediatrics (2015). *The Impact of Marijuana Policies on Youth: Clinical, Research, and Legal Update*: Pediatrics Volume 135/Issue 3. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/135/3/584>