

Cannabis and Pregnancy

What is cannabis?

Cannabis is also known as weed, marijuana, hashish, hash, and pot. Cannabis comes from the cannabis plant. Cannabis can be inhaled (smoked), swallowed (e.g., in food and drinks), placed under the tongue (e.g., strips and sprays), or applied on the skin (e.g., oils and creams). Cannabis contains hundreds of chemicals. The most researched of these is tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is the chemical in cannabis that makes people feel “high”. The strength of the cannabis product depends on the level of THC in the product. Cannabidiol (CBD) is another chemical in cannabis. Unlike THC, it does not make people feel “high”.

Is cannabis safe to use in pregnancy?

Cannabis is now legal in Canada (as of October 17), but this does not necessarily mean it is safe to use. It is important that people understand the negative effects that cannabis can have before, during, and after pregnancy.

There is no amount of cannabis that is known to be safe during pregnancy. For a woman who is pregnant, or who might become pregnant, researchers and doctors recommend that not using cannabis is the safest choice.

If a pregnant woman cannot stop using cannabis, she should try to use smaller amounts and use less often. This may lower the risk of harmful outcomes to the baby. Research shows that harmful outcomes for children exposed to cannabis during pregnancy are most often seen with women who use cannabis often during pregnancy and throughout the entire pregnancy. Less is known about the potential harms of low to moderate use during pregnancy. Until more is known, it is safest for a woman who is pregnant, or who might become pregnant, to not use cannabis.

What effects can cannabis have on fertility and pregnancy?

- Cannabis use may negatively impact fertility (make it harder to get pregnant).
- Cannabis use during pregnancy may harm the developing baby (e.g., baby may be smaller than normal, born too early, or have birth defects).
- Children who are exposed to cannabis during pregnancy (in the womb) may experience negative effects in childhood and adolescence (e.g., poorer memory and verbal skills; behavioural changes, such as increased rates of impulsivity and hyperactivity).
- Infants and children who are exposed to cannabis through breast milk may experience negative effects, such as lethargy (lack of energy), poor feeding habits, and slower motor development (the ability to move).

Where can someone get help?

If you or someone you know needs help quitting, call the HealthLine at 811 for advice and support.

Where can someone find more information?

For more information about the potential effects of cannabis use before, during, and after pregnancy, please visit the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute’s website at www.skprevention.ca.