

Press Release

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Studies Say as Marijuana Becomes More Potent, Teens Are Becoming Ill**

With THC levels close to 100 percent, today's cannabis products are making some teenagers highly dependent and dangerously ill. Marijuana is not as dangerous as a drug like fentanyl, but it can have potentially harmful effects especially for young people, whose brains are still developing. In addition to uncontrollable vomiting and addiction, adolescents who frequently use high doses of cannabis may also experience psychosis that could possibly lead to a lifelong psychiatric disorder, an increased likelihood of developing depression and suicidal ideation, changes in brain anatomy and connectivity and poor memory.

But despite these dangers, the potency of the products currently on the market is largely unregulated. In 1995, the average concentration of THC in cannabis samples seized by the Drug Enforcement Administration was about 4 percent. By 2017, it was 17 percent. And now cannabis manufacturers are extracting THC to make oils; edibles; wax; sugar-size crystals; and glass-like products called shatter that advertise high THC levels in some cases exceeding 95 percent. Meanwhile, the average level of CBD - the nonintoxicating compound from the cannabis plant tied to relief from seizures, pain, anxiety and inflammation -has been on the decline in cannabis plants. Studies suggest that lower levels of CBD can potentially make cannabis more addictive.

The Food and Drug Administration has sent public warnings about various cannabis products, including edibles, but to date, federal regulators haven't taken action to curb potency levels because cannabis is federally illegal. California lawmakers are now considering adding a mental health warning label to cannabis products specifying that the drug may contribute to psychotic disorders.

National surveys suggest that marijuana use among 8th, 10th and 12th graders decreased in 2021, a change partly attributed to the pandemic. However, over the two-year interval from 2017 to 2019, the number of youth who reported vaping marijuana over the last 30 days rose among all grades, nearly tripling among high school seniors. In 2020, 35 percent of seniors, and as many as 44 percent of college students, reported using marijuana in the past year.

Michael McDonell, an addiction treatment expert at the Washington State University college of medicine, said that more research is needed to better understand how much more prevalent psychosis and cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome have become among teenagers and others using high potency products. Cannabis hyperemesis syndrome is a rare condition in people who use cannabis. It causes recurrent, severe vomiting and nausea. People with CHS often bathe or shower compulsively to try to relieve symptoms.

Researchers know there is a dose-dependent relationship between THC and psychosis. Studies have found that the risk of having a psychotic disorder was five times higher among daily high potency cannabis users in Europe and Brazil than those who had never used it. Another study, published in 2021 in JAMA Psychiatry, reported that, in 1995, only 2 percent of schizophrenia diagnoses in Denmark were associated with marijuana use, but by 2010 that figure had risen to 6 to 8 percent, which researchers associated with increases in the use and potency of cannabis.

There is no doubt that higher concentration products are increasing the number of people who have bad experiences with cannabis. Psychotic symptoms while high can include hallucinations, trouble distinguishing between fantasy and reality, and strange behaviors. It can be difficult to pinpoint exactly how much THC enters someone's brain when they're using cannabis. That's because it's not just the frequency of use and THC concentration that affect dosage, it's also how fast the chemicals are delivered to the brain. In vaporizers, the speed of delivery can change depending on the base the THC is dissolved in, the strength of the device's battery and how warm the product becomes when it's heated up.

Young people are also more likely to become addicted when they start using marijuana before the age of 18, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Furthermore, there is growing evidence that cannabis can alter the brain during adolescence, a period when it is already undergoing structural changes. Until more is known, researchers and clinicians recommend postponing cannabis use until later in life.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is concerned about marijuana use and its consequences on the health and development of youth. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about marijuana use at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).