

Cannabis use is not recommended during pregnancy or when breastfeeding or pumping milk for your baby. Many women who use marijuana during pregnancy believe it is relatively safe.¹ Some people use cannabis to ease common side effects of pregnancy like nausea, anxiety or sleep issues. Like any medication, substance, supplement or homeopathic treatment, there are risks associated with cannabis use during pregnancy and while breastfeeding or pumping.

The effects of cannabis on the unborn child and newborn baby are not well known. There are many reasons why studying cannabis use during pregnancy is difficult. The lack of evidence or insufficient data does not mean its use is harmless. Whether you use therapeutic or recreational cannabis, there are few things to consider about use under these circumstances.

Things to Consider about Cannabis Use:

- Cannabis contains about 400 different chemicals, and some of which can be contaminated with other drugs, pesticides, and/or fungi. Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the chemical compound that makes people feel high.^{2,3}
- Today's cannabis has higher THC concentration than ever before. The higher the concentration of THC, the stronger the effects on the brain, leading to higher rates of dependency, addiction, and cannabis-related emergency room visits.⁴ Studies done years ago on cannabis with lower THC levels may not accurately reflect the possible risks for current users.
- Using cannabis while you are pregnant passes THC to your baby through your placenta (the organ that feeds your baby). Higher potency cannabis has a stronger effect on your baby's developing brain and body and increases the risk of complications.⁵
- Some women who use cannabis during pregnancy may have other risk factors such as use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, medical conditions, and/or lack of prenatal care.⁶
- Studies on "THC free" products or CBD

products find that many actually contain a measurable amount of THC. Because this is another area where there is little research, it is best to avoid the use of CBD while pregnant or breastfeeding to limit problems.⁷

It is important to discuss all your substance use (including therapeutic cannabis) with your healthcare provider to weigh the risks and benefits for you and your baby. Your doctor can help you find safer medication or other approaches.

Because there is so much we don't know about the harmful effects of cannabis use during pregnancy and breastfeeding, it is best to avoid all use. There is no known safe time, type, or amount of cannabis use while pregnant and breastfeeding. Talk with your provider about safer options.

CANNABIS USE AND YOUR DEVELOPING BABY

While cannabis might be natural, that doesn't mean that it's safe. Not all natural substances or plants are safe. For example, lead, tobacco, and poisonous berries are naturally occurring and yet can be harmful.

Studies consistently link regular smoking of cannabis during pregnancy to a higher risk of having an underweight baby or giving birth too early (pre-term). Both conditions are linked to infant sickness and death.^{8,9} These babies are more likely to be transferred to intensive care units instead of going right home.¹⁰ Some research also suggests an increased risk of stillbirth. It is not known if this is only because of cannabis or due to the use of other substances along with cannabis, such as cigarettes or alcohol.¹¹

Studies link cannabis use during pregnancy to a higher rate of challenges with learning, attention and behavior later in life, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder for the child. Also, studies show children who were exposed to cannabis in utero have increased mental health challenges in middle school years and increased risk of substance use problems in adulthood.¹²

CANNABIS, THC, CBD AND BREASTFEEDING

- Breastfeeding or pumping breast milk is a healthy choice for you and your baby. However, chemicals from cannabis can be passed to your baby through breast milk. THC is stored in fat and is slowly released over time. It can be found in breastmilk in small quantities from six days to six weeks.¹³ Because of this, the technique of pumping, then dumping the breastmilk does not work. These chemicals could be passed on to your baby and be detected if your baby was screened. One recent study reported that breastfed babies ingest approximately 2.5% of the mother's THC dose.^{14,15} Avoid use to limit problems.
- For these reasons and more, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other public health organizations advise against the use of CBD, THC, and cannabis in any form during a pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER

Many pregnant people are afraid they will be judged and worry they will get in trouble if they tell their healthcare provider they

use cannabis or THC products. Healthcare providers, like everyone else in NH, must report a situation where a child is unsafe. However, using substances during pregnancy does not automatically mandate a call to the Division of Children, Youth and Families. Healthcare providers must make a report when they think a child's safety is a concern. If you are concerned, ask your doctor how they handle this situation during your prenatal visits and when you deliver your baby. Make an informed decision before you share information about your substance use.

To figure out what's best in your situation, talk with your healthcare provider about all substances, medications, and supplements (including therapeutic cannabis) you are taking to understand the risks and benefits of use before, during, and after pregnancy.



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

The Partnership @drugfreeNH

drugfreenh.org: A safe place to gather and learn about local strategies and activities to prevent substance misuse.

The Doorway

thedoortway.nh.gov or call 2-1-1 (or 1-866-444-4211): A statewide service that supports any NH resident, of any age, with a substance or alcohol concern or issue.

NH Alcohol and Drug Treatment Locator

nhtreatment.org: A searchable database with treatment agencies and individual practitioners offering substance use disorder services.

2-1-1 NH

211NH.org: A comprehensive source of information about local resources and services to help you take care of yourself.

Northern New England Poison Control Center

nnepc.org: Some cannabis products like edibles are more likely to appeal to children. To avoid accidental poisoning, make sure you store all cannabis products in child-safe containers and lock them away like you would any other medication. Call 1- 800-222-1222 or text POISON to 85511, 24 hours/day for questions or concerns about accidental exposure.

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- 5 Accessed June 7, 2021: <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/marijuana-pregnancy/>
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- 14 Accessed on June 3, 2021, <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/marijuana-pregnancy/>
- 15 <https://www.cdc.gov/cannabis/faqs/breastfeeding-while-using-cannabis.html>, retrieved February 2021