

Cannabis Use While Pregnant or Lactating- Topic of the Month

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On August 1, 2023, Minnesota became the 23rd state to legalize recreational cannabis for persons aged 21 and above. Legalization of cannabis does not imply that it is safe or recommended for all individuals. This topic of the month will focus on what WIC staff should know about cannabis and the information we should be sharing with our participants.

What is cannabis?

Cannabis refers to all products derived from the plants *Cannabis sativa*, *Cannabis indica*, and *Cannabis ruderalis*. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), a mind-altering chemical, is the primary active substance in marijuana. THC is highly lipophilic, allowing it to easily enter cells, spread throughout the body, and remain stored in fat tissue for weeks. THC use may result in altered judgment, impaired memory, and mood changes. Marijuana is the common name for the drug cannabis.

Cannabis is one of the most commonly used addictive drugs after tobacco and alcohol. Cannabis use during and after pregnancy *is increasing* nationwide. The increased legalization of cannabis for medical or adult recreational use may give people a false sense of safety.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) released updated guidance on [Cannabis Use During Pregnancy and Lactation](#) in September 2025. ACOG recommends that obstetrician–gynecologists and other obstetric health care professionals advise cessation of cannabis use during pregnancy and lactation. The guidance also highlights the need for health care providers to educate patients about the potential risks of cannabis use during these critical periods and to offer cessation support.

WIC staff should know the facts about cannabis and its use and be prepared to discuss the potential harmful effects of drugs, alcohol, and other substances as a part of initial education and whenever appropriate.

Read this topic memo and learn more at: [Cannabis and Your Health- MN Dept. of Health.](#)

Things WIC staff should know about cannabis use:

- Cannabis use during pregnancy may impact fetal brain development and increase the risk of low birth weight, preterm birth, and stillbirth.
- THC can pass to the baby through the bloodstream into the placenta and breastmilk and can be detected in the infant’s urine for 2-5 weeks after exposure. Since THC is stored in fat, it could continue to expose the baby over time.

- There is an increased effect after exposure to THC for infants due to their small size and particular concern regarding infants' long-term neurobehavioral development with continued use.
- Pumping and dumping is not an effective way to avoid infant exposure.
- Along with ACOG, the American Academy of Pediatrics, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention all encourage parents to abstain from cannabis use while pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding.
- The American Psychiatric Association states: "There is no current scientific evidence that cannabis is in any way beneficial for the treatment of any psychiatric disorder."

Things WIC staff should know about cannabis today:

- Cannabis available today is much stronger than it ever was and may be mixed with other substances that have negative or unknown health effects.
 - Cannabis smoke has many of the same chemicals as tobacco smoke and may increase the risk of breathing problems for the parent and developmental delays in the baby.
 - Vaping cannabis is not a safe alternative. Vaping products contain formaldehyde—a cancer-causing substance linked to breathing problems, skin irritation, sleep and menstrual disorders, and infertility.
- Cannabis products are constantly evolving and are available in many forms to be smoked, vaped, or consumed as an edible.
 - Edibles are products made with cannabis that you can eat or drink. Edibles can resemble food products such as gummy candy, cookies, chocolate, and beverages.
 - While products that are smoked or vaped such as flower or dabs usually take effect in a matter of minutes, edible products and drinks can take up to two hours to kick in. Effects can last for several hours and may vary by product.
- THC levels are often increased in the more concentrated forms: edibles, dabs, drinks, and vape pens.
 - Physical dependence, addiction, and other negative consequences (anxiety, paranoia, psychosis) increase with exposure to higher THC concentrations.

Education and risk

Legalization of cannabis does not change WIC nutrition assessment and risk assignment policy or procedures. Additionally, education about the potential harm from the use of cannabis and other drugs is still required.

- **Educational requirements:** Education about the dangers of cannabis use is still required for pregnant participants, breastfeeding participants, and parents of infants and children.

- **WIC MOM Policy:** [Section 6.4: Drug and Harmful Substance Use Education](#) requires WIC staff to inform participants of the potential harm that alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (including cannabis) can cause, *whether they report using or not*.
 - Share the nutrition education card [Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs \(PDF\)](#) with participants.
- **Risk assessment and Risk Code assignment:** Use of drugs or alcohol (including cannabis) will continue to be part of the [WIC Nutrition Assessment](#) questions. Read examples in the tool: [Training Tool for Pregnant Women Assessment Questions \(PDF\)](#) under E: 900's Environmental/Other Factors.
- **WIC Risk Code:** [372- Alcohol and Substance Use](#) may be assigned during pregnancy or for breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding postpartum participants in the following conditions:
 - Any illegal substance use or abuse of prescription medications.
 - Any cannabis use in any form.

WIC's role

It is important to note that WIC's role is to screen and provide education, referrals, and coordination of services. WIC does not diagnose or provide in-depth counseling regarding the use of substances. When talking to a participant, keep the assessment non-judgmental and the education factual. Maintain a list of referral resources to offer participants as needed.

WIC can encourage participants to improve their lifestyle and health habits during pregnancy and postpartum, since the concern for fetal health and the desire to be a good role model can be a powerful motivator to reduce or stop substance use. WIC also provides supplemental foods that are rich in nutrients that may be lost due to alcohol and substance misuse.

As always, be sure to document what was discussed and what resources were provided.

Safe and responsible use

Cannabis may be legal for people over age 21 in Minnesota, but it is important to make sure participants and caregivers who plan to use it understand how to reduce potential risks. If you notice a strong smell of cannabis coming from a participant or family member during the assessment portion of the appointment, you might ask, "Does anyone in your home currently use tobacco, cannabis, or other substances?" Depending on the answer, probe further to better understand the participant's circumstances and determine what information and resources you may share.

Be aware that some pregnant women may get encouragement from family or friends to use cannabis to alleviate morning sickness or other health concerns. Additionally, since cannabis is now legal and widely available in many states, participants might assume it is safe to use as a "natural" alternative to medication. Inform participants that there is a lack of data on safety and the potential risks of using cannabis as "medicine." It is best practice to refer participants

to their health care provider for safe and FDA-approved treatments for symptoms related to nausea, depression, pain, and other health-related conditions.

Sharing evidence-based facts such as the ones shared in this memo will offer the participant informed consent so that they will be able to make the best decision regarding safe and responsible use for themselves and their family.

Mandatory reporting

As a general rule, anyone who works with children, cares for children, or offers professional services for children is considered a mandatory reporter.

- If you are concerned about a participant's use of cannabis or other illicit drugs while pregnant, breastfeeding, or in the presence of their children, **refer to your local agency's policy and procedure on mandatory reporting.**
- If you haven't already, consider connecting with your local agency's child protection staff to provide staff training and for additional guidance and resources.

Things to share with participants (if asked):

- Studies have shown that the effects of [cannabis and secondhand smoke](#) can be passed on to infants and children.
- Being high, buzzed, or sleepy from cannabis use while caring for a child is not safe!
- Make sure cannabis is stored safely. Keep cannabis products such as edibles and drinks in child-resistant packaging, locked up in an area where a child cannot see, reach, or access them.
- To avoid dangerous interactions with prescribed medications, talk to a health care provider or pharmacist before using cannabis.
- If pregnant or breastfeeding or have been diagnosed with or are predisposed to serious mental illness, talk with a health care provider before using cannabis.
- Cannabis should always be used responsibly and never used before driving a vehicle or operating heavy machinery. Cannabis can cause slower reactions, dizziness, confusion, and trouble thinking. Driving under the influence of cannabis is illegal and subject to additional DWI and DUI sanctions. Do not allow children to ride in a car if the driver is high.

Resources for families

- Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)'s, WIC program developed the [Cannabis and Your Baby \(PDF\)](#) to support WIC families.
- MDH launched [Be Cannabis Aware](#), a new public health campaign focused on educating youth under age 25—and the adults who support them—about cannabis use.

- MDH created a [What to Know About Cannabis for You, Your Baby, and Young Children Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#), which can be found on the [Cannabis Materials](#) webpage. It is available in Spanish, Somali, and Hmong.
- The Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment has a [Cannabis fact sheets in multiple languages](#) that may be shared with participants upon request. It is available in Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, and Arabic.
- If there is a concern that cannabis use is disrupting daily life or causing problems at home, work, or school, encourage the participant to talk to a health care provider or substance use counselor. Minnesota Drug Addiction and Substance Abuse Hotline is free and available 24/7 at (866) 210-1303.

NOTE: The information offered in this memo provides basic guidance for local agency staff. The state of MN continues to provide updated resources and guidance that will support our work in educating families.

Find more information: [Welcome/ Office of Cannabis Management](#) (Minnesota.gov) or [Cannabis](#) (Minnesota Department of Health).

Training tips (group activity):

Discussing topics such as cannabis use can be very difficult. Practicing that conversation is often helpful in making staff feel more at ease in providing information to participants.

- **Read** through the facts above. Break into small groups (or if alone, discuss virtually with a colleague) to discuss the facts and concerns about this sensitive topic.
- **Practice.** Imagine what it might feel like if a participant shared with you that they are using cannabis while pregnant or breastfeeding. Role-play a conversation about cannabis use during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Take turns playing the CPA and participant.
- **Share your experiences.** Has a participant ever informed you of their cannabis use? How did you handle it? What did you learn?

Resources for staff

1. Fact sheet for providers: [What to Know About Cannabis Use During Pregnancy, Postpartum, and Early Childhood \(PDF\)](#) (MDH)
2. [Cannabis \(Marijuana\)](#) (National Institute of Health)
3. [Marijuana and Pregnancy](#) (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
4. [Cannabis](#) (Drugs and Lactation Database (LactMed), National Library of Medicine)
5. [Marijuana Use During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Implications for Neonatal and Childhood Outcomes](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics)

6. [What You Should Know About Using Cannabis, Including CBD, When Pregnant or Breastfeeding](#) (United States Food and Drug Administration)
7. [Substance Use Prevention Screening, Education, and Referral Resource Guide for Local WIC Agencies](#) (United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service)

Reference – complete listing of hyperlinks:

[Cannabis Use During Pregnancy and Lactation](https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/clinical-consensus/articles/2025/10/cannabis-use-during-pregnancy-and-lactation?utm_source=chatgpt.com) (https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/clinical-consensus/articles/2025/10/cannabis-use-during-pregnancy-and-lactation?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

[Cannabis and Your Health- MN Dept. of Health](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/yourhealth.html)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/yourhealth.html)

[Section 6.4: Drug and Harmful Substance Use Education](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch6/sctn6_4.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/program/mom/chsctns/ch6/sctn6_4.pdf)

[Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/gendrugs.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/gendrugs.pdf)

[WIC Nutrition Assessment](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/na.html)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/na.html)

[Training Tool for Pregnant Women Assessment Questions](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/pregnant.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/pregnant.pdf)

[372- Alcohol and Substance Use](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/372.html)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/372.html)

[Cannabis and Secondhand Smoke](https://www.cdc.gov/cannabis/health-effects/secondhand-smoke.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/health-effects/second-hand-smoke.html) (https://www.cdc.gov/cannabis/health-effects/secondhand-smoke.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/health-effects/second-hand-smoke.html)

[Cannabis and Your Baby](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/gencannabis.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/gencannabis.pdf)

[Be Cannabis Aware](https://becannabisaware.org/) (https://becannabisaware.org/)

[What to Know About Cannabis for You, Your Baby, and Young Children Fact Sheet](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/docs/wtkyou.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/docs/wtkyou.pdf)

[Cannabis Materials](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/materials.html) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/materials.html)

[Welcome/ Office of Cannabis Management](https://mn.gov/ocm/) (https://mn.gov/ocm/)

[Cannabis](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/index.html) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/index.html)

[What to Know About Cannabis Use During Pregnancy, Postpartum, and Early Childhood](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/docs/wtkpregproviders.pdf)
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/cannabis/docs/wtkpregproviders.pdf)

[Cannabis \(Marijuana\)](https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cannabis-marijuana) (<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cannabis-marijuana>)

[Marijuana and Pregnancy](https://www.acog.org/womens-health/infographics/marijuana-and-pregnancy#:~:text=Research%20is%20limited%20on%20the,or%20breastfeeding%20not%20use%20marijuana.) (<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/infographics/marijuana-and-pregnancy#:~:text=Research%20is%20limited%20on%20the,or%20breastfeeding%20not%20use%20marijuana.>)

[Cannabis](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501587/#:~:text=Cannabis%20can%20affect%20serum%20prolactin,not%20believe%20it%20is%20harmful.)

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501587/#:~:text=Cannabis%20can%20affect%20serum%20prolactin,not%20believe%20it%20is%20harmful.>)

[Marijuana Use During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Implications for Neonatal and Childhood Outcomes](https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/3/e20181889/38625/Marijuana-Use-During-Pregnancy-and-Breastfeeding?autologincheck=redirected?nfToken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000) (<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/3/e20181889/38625/Marijuana-Use-During-Pregnancy-and-Breastfeeding?autologincheck=redirected?nfToken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000>)

[What You Should Know About Using Cannabis, Including CBD, When Pregnant or Breastfeeding](https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/what-you-should-know-about-using-cannabis-including-cbd-when-pregnant-or-breastfeeding) (<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/what-you-should-know-about-using-cannabis-including-cbd-when-pregnant-or-breastfeeding>)

[Substance Use Prevention Screening, Education, and Referral Resource Guide for Local WIC Agencies](https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/ResourceManual%20rev%204-17-18.pdf)

(<https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/ResourceManual%20rev%204-17-18.pdf>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL, MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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