

Marijuana Use During Pregnancy & Breastfeeding FAQs

If you are pregnant, you may have read that marijuana can help with morning sickness. After baby arrives, you might even consider using marijuana to relieve stress. Should you still breastfeed if you smoke marijuana? These are all tricky questions—especially as more states legalize marijuana ([/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/legalizing-marijuana.aspx](#)) for adult or medical use.



The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2018-1889>) women who are pregnant or breastfeeding avoid marijuana use. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) also recommends (<https://www.acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Obstetric-Practice/Marijuana-Use-During-Pregnancy-and-Lactation>) that obstetrician-gynecologists counsel women against using marijuana while trying to get pregnant, during pregnancy, and while they are breastfeeding.

No amount of marijuana has been proven safe to use during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

How does marijuana effect brain development?

- Studies show marijuana use during pregnancy and breastfeeding may have negative effects on the developing brain. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)—the compound in marijuana mostly responsible for its psychoactive effects—has been shown to cross the placenta and enter the brain of the developing fetus during pregnancy. Once in a baby's system, it can "hijack" normal nerve cell growth that happens in the developing brain. For example, in some studies, prenatal marijuana exposure was linked with increased tremors and startle reflexes in newborns and a possibly higher risk of substance use disorder ([/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Vulnerable-to-Substance-Abuse.aspx](#)) and mental illness ([/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Mental-Health-and-Teens-Watch-for-Danger-Signs.aspx](#)) among teens and adults. In other studies, marijuana use during pregnancy was associated with problems in problem-solving skills, memory, visual perception, behavior, attention, executive function, and impulse control in the children especially as they became teenagers and young adults.

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Is today's marijuana stronger than it was years ago?

- The THC concentration in marijuana has quadrupled since the 1980s—when studies linking marijuana use during pregnancy to child growth and behavior differences were conducted. Whether marijuana is smoked, vaped (</English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/E-cigarettes.aspx>), or consumed in edibles (</English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Edible-Marijuana-Dangers.aspx>) and drinkables, the amount of THC reaching a fetus and newborn may be a lot higher than in the past.

If I smoke marijuana, can it pass into my breastmilk?

- Yes. You may pass the chemicals from marijuana to your baby through breastmilk. A study (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/3/e20181076>) in the September 2018 *Pediatrics* confirms earlier findings (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29630019>) that THC can transfer into breastmilk. The AAP also reminds that a mother's ability to care for an infant may be impaired while using marijuana. Bottomline: If you are breastfeeding, don't use marijuana.

Is marijuana safer than tobacco?

- No. Studies show that between 48% and 60% of marijuana users continue during their entire pregnancy, thinking it's safer than tobacco (</English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Smoking-During-Pregnancy.aspx>). However, research also shows that when marijuana is smoked, carbon monoxide blood concentrations in the pregnant woman are 5 times higher than those when tobacco is smoked. This can mean less oxygen to be available for the fetus.

What should I know about secondhand marijuana smoke?

- Passive or secondhand smoke can be as much a concern with marijuana as it is with tobacco. Studies show people can be exposed to marijuana by inhaling it when the drug is smoked near them. It can cause a positive urine test for THC—which means the THC was in their blood. This means that if a pregnant or breastfeeding woman is exposed to marijuana smoke the THC can transfer to the mother's blood and then to the fetus or mother's breastmilk.

Is morning sickness a qualifying condition for medical marijuana?

- No. Chemotherapy-related nausea is a qualifying condition in most states with legalized medical marijuana. Although many women experience nausea during pregnancy, the use of medical marijuana in this specific case has never been studied or determined to be safe.

Are pediatricians mandated to report mothers who are using marijuana while pregnant or breastfeeding to child protective services?

- Yes. The Child Abuse and Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/capta2010.pdf>) requires all states to have reporting policies and procedures for when newborns and other children are exposed to illegal substances. Because marijuana is still illegal under federal law, CAPTA applies to marijuana exposure in all states regardless of the legal status of marijuana use by adults in each state. Individual states may have their own policies about reporting exposure to marijuana through pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Remember: If you are pregnant or nursing, the safest choice for your child is to avoid marijuana.

Your pediatrician is a good source of information about potential risks of marijuana use (</English/news/Pages/Nations-Pediatricians-Warn-of-Rising-Risks-to-Youth-from-Loosening-Marijuana-Laws.aspx>) on fetal, infant, and child development. Conversations can happen during discussions about the use of alcohol (</English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Alcohol-During-Pregnancy.aspx>), other drugs, or contraception.

Just because marijuana is legal in some areas for medical or recreational use for those ages 21 and above, that doesn't mean it's safe—especially for children exposed to it prenatally or while breastfeeding. There's just too much we don't know about the ways it might affect children.

The AAP is calling for additional research so that we can better understand how prenatal marijuana exposure affects our children—at every stage of their lives.

Additional Information & Resources:

- [Marijuana: What Parents Need to Know \(/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Marijuana-Cannabis.aspx\)](#)
- [Legalizing Marijuana Not Good for Kids: AAP Policy Explained \(/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/legalizing-marijuana.aspx\)](#)
- [Edible Marijuana Dangers: How Parents Can Prevent Pot Poisoning \(/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Edible-Marijuana-Dangers.aspx\)](#)
- [Marijuana Use During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Implications for Neonatal and Childhood Outcomes \(<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2018-1889>\)\(AAP Clinical Report\)](#)
- [Counseling Parents and Teens About Marijuana Use in the Era of Legalization of Marijuana \(<http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-4069>\) \(AAP Clinical Report\)](#)
- [The Impact of Marijuana Policies on Youth: Clinical, Research, and Legal Update \(<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2014-4146>\) \(AAP Policy Statement\)](#)

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