

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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Cannabis and Pregnancy

Now that cannabis is legal in Canada, pregnant and breastfeeding women or those that might become pregnant need information on how to make healthy decisions for themselves and their baby.

Throughout pregnancy, a baby's quickly developing brain is very sensitive to harmful environments. Things that can harm a baby's brain include certain illnesses, and being exposed to chemicals like alcohol, tobacco, tobacco-like products, cannabis (marijuana, hashish, hash oil) and other drugs. Because of this, pregnant women should not use cannabis in any form (marijuana, hashish, hash oil) because the mother and the baby's health can be affected. Using cannabis while breastfeeding is also not advised as it is passed into breastmilk and stored there, and could affect a baby's developing brain.

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the main active chemical in the cannabis plant that gives people who use it a 'high'. THC affects areas of the brain that control memory, concentration, and coordination. Cannabidiol (CBD) is an active chemical in the cannabis plant that's used for medicinal purposes. The levels of THC and CBD vary depending on the plant strain used, but all forms of cannabis have health risks. Using cannabis may also cause other side-effects. It can:

- impair your short-term memory
- cause you to make poor decisions and affect your ability to care for your child
- affect your coordination
- increase anxiety or paranoid thoughts
- increase your heart rate

During pregnancy, the placenta and umbilical cord connect mother and baby. Even though cannabis comes from a plant, there are toxins and chemicals in cannabis that can pass through the placenta to a developing baby and may affect their health and development. Developing babies exposed to cannabis are at higher risk for low birth weight, which is associated with health problems later in life. After they're born they might not be able to self-soothe and may have problems with sleep. There may also be long-term effects such as:

- abnormal brain development
- slower growth
- learning disabilities and behaviour concerns

Until more is known about the short- and long-term effects of cannabis, it's safest to avoid using cannabis while pregnant or breastfeeding. Talk with your health care provider for information on cutting down and quitting if you're using cannabis. If you are having issues with nausea, appetite changes or mood, talk with your health care provider about safe ways to manage these symptoms.

AHS has a wealth of resources already developed and more that were recently created about the use of cannabis during pregnancy and breastfeeding on both our drugsafe.ca website and through our Healthy Parents, Healthy Children resources.

If you use cannabis for medical reasons, talk with your health care provider about finding a safer alternative while pregnant or breastfeeding.

To learn more about cannabis and other drugs, and cutting back and quitting, call the Addiction Helpline available 24/7 toll-free at 1-866-332-2322, or visit HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca