

# Substance Use & Pregnancy: Cannabis



The active compounds in cannabis, especially **tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)**, can pass from the mother to the developing fetus through the bloodstream. THC is a substance that can alter how the brain works and grows, which is why its presence in the body during pregnancy raises concerns about potential negative impacts on the baby's neurological and physical development.

Are you pregnant and using cannabis?  
Here are some important questions to discuss with a doctor

What are the potential risks of using cannabis during pregnancy?

What should I do if I'm having trouble stopping cannabis use during pregnancy?

Are there any alternatives or treatments if I'm using cannabis for medical reasons?

How might cannabis affect breastfeeding?

Can using cannabis during pregnancy cause behavioral or mental health issues for my child later in life?

Will my baby's development be impacted if I use cannabis in the early stages of pregnancy (before I knew I was pregnant)?

Could cannabis use affect my ability to have a healthy birth experience or interfere with pain management during labor?



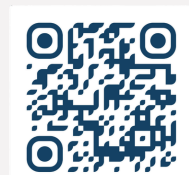
## Key Facts To Consider

- Cannabis use during pregnancy may increase the risk of complications to the baby's physical and neurological development.
- There is an increased risk of the baby being born with **Anencephaly** (see next page).
- Cannabis can also affect a woman's fertility and result in difficulties conceiving in the future.<sup>1</sup>



## Cannabis Use During Pregnancy

- Cannabis use can result in placental abruption<sup>2</sup>, which is the sudden detachment of the placenta from the uterine wall. This puts both the mother and baby's health at significant risk and is one of the primary causes of death for both pregnant women and their babies.<sup>3</sup>
- Cannabis use during pregnancy may elevate a mother's blood pressure, restricting blood flow to various organs in the mother's body, including the liver, kidneys, brain, uterus, and placenta. High blood pressure from cannabis use can also increase the risk of gestational hypertension and preeclampsia.<sup>2</sup>
- According to a study of over 1.2 million births in British Columbia, Ontario and Newfoundland/Labrador between 2012-2019, cannabis use is also associated with a variety of issues including preterm birth, low birth weight, gestational diabetes, and underdevelopment of the fetus<sup>4</sup>.



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## Complications With Delivery

- Using cannabis while pregnant can cause complications during delivery including underdeveloped organs, difficulty breathing and extended stays in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).<sup>5</sup>
- Increased risk of low birth weight, increasing risks of developmental delays, infections, and difficulty maintaining body temperature after birth.<sup>5</sup>
- Increased risk of fetal growth restriction, leading to complications during childbirth and may affect the child's health and development later in life.<sup>6</sup>



## Cannabis & Breastfeeding

- Cannabis use may negatively affect the production and quality of breast milk, further compromising the baby's nourishment.
- THC levels in breast milk can be up to 8 times higher than in the mother's blood.<sup>1</sup>
- The presence of cannabis in breastmilk can result in a baby becoming drowsy which can make them have difficulty latching on and getting enough breast milk.<sup>1</sup>



## Impact on Early Childhood

- Cannabis use during pregnancy can result in low birth weight, which is associated with poor long-term health outcomes, including increase risk of diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and respiratory problems.<sup>7</sup>
- Children exposed to THC prenatally may experience challenges in verbal and visual reasoning and language comprehension.<sup>7</sup>
- Additional effects of cannabis use during pregnancy can include issues with sleeping, memory, impulsive behavior, difficulty with learning and understanding new information, symptoms with depression/anxiety and hyperactivity that can begin during infancy and continue throughout a young person's life.<sup>1</sup>

## Anencephaly<sup>8</sup>

Anencephaly is a severe condition which causes the brain and bones of the skull to not develop properly. When the neural tube does not close correctly, the developing brain and spinal cord are left exposed to the amniotic fluid surrounding the fetus. This exposure causes the nervous system tissue to deteriorate.

As a result, babies born with anencephaly are missing large portions of their brain, including the cerebrum and cerebellum, which are responsible for essential functions such as thinking, hearing, vision, emotions, and movement coordination. Additionally, the bones of the skull may be absent or poorly formed.

Due to the severity of these conditions, nearly all babies born with anencephaly either die before birth or within a few hours after birth.

## Reference List

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3. Schmidt, Skelley & Raines, 2022. [Placental Abruption.](#)
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5. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), 2023. [Cannabis use during pregnancy associated with adverse birth outcomes.](#)
6. South Alberta FASD Network, 2024. [Cannabis Use during Pregnancy: An Update.](#)
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8. March of Dimes, 2020. [Marijuana and Pregnancy.](#)