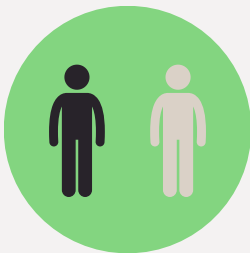


# Substances At A Glance: Cannabis

*In 2024, 8% of teens and 11% of young adults reported using cannabis for medical purposes. However, over 90% reported they did so without healthcare professional authorization.<sup>1</sup>*



**What is cannabis?** Cannabis is a plant containing roughly 400 different chemicals. The main active chemical in cannabis is THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), which affects the brain the most. It is a mind-altering chemical that gives those who use cannabis a high. Another active chemical in cannabis is CBD (cannabidiol), which is being studied for its potential medical applications.



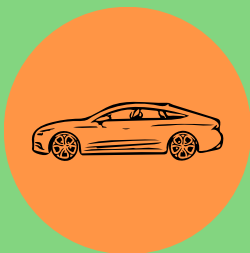
**Cannabis use among youth:** In Canada, 18% of youth in grades 7-12 report using cannabis in the past 12 months,<sup>2</sup> as well as 43% of post-secondary age students.<sup>3</sup> Average age of initiation of cannabis use is 14 and the most common ways youth use cannabis are smoking, vaping and consuming cannabis edibles.<sup>2</sup>



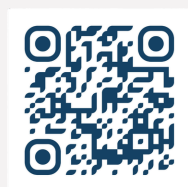
**Why do youth use cannabis?** Young people use cannabis for different reasons, which may include relaxing, having fun or changing their perspective. Others use cannabis to help manage stress, fall asleep, cope with difficult situations or because their friends are doing it. Anyone who is thinking of using cannabis for any medical purpose should consult with their healthcare provider to consider alternative support strategies, especially if their medical history suggests using cannabis may cause their condition to worsen.



**Cannabis and the law:** Purchase, sale and possession of cannabis is legal for Canadians age 19+ except Alberta (18+) and Quebec (21+). Youth under the legal age cannot possess, buy, grow or sell cannabis, and may face fines or receive a criminal record for doing so. Adults who sell/give cannabis to youth, or use youth to help them commit cannabis-related offenses, can face significant fines as well as time in Federal prison.

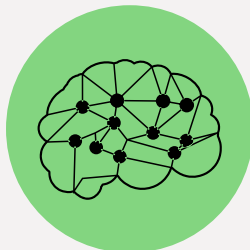


**Cannabis and driving:** Driving after using cannabis is dangerous & illegal in Canada. THC can impair focus, judgment, depth perception and delay reaction time. Cannabis use before driving can increase the risk of being involved in a fatal collision by up to five times.<sup>4</sup> Youth are also more likely to get into a vehicle with a cannabis-impaired driver, which still puts them at risk for being injured or killed in a collision. Cannabis is currently the most commonly found substance in dead and injured drivers in Canada, at a rate even higher than alcohol.<sup>5</sup>



# Substances At A Glance: Cannabis

*In 2021, substance-related hospital stays for children and youth age 10-24 were more likely to be caused by cannabis than alcohol or other drugs.<sup>6</sup>*



**Short and long-term effects:** Cannabis can make people feel many different sensations depending on the product they are using, their history with cannabis use, body type and many other factors. Some people feel more relaxed when using, while others feel more energized. Some people may consume too much cannabis and experience symptoms of cannabis poisoning such as confusion, paranoia, fever, nausea, vomiting, heart palpitations, delusions or hallucinations.



**What are the risks of cannabis use?** Smoking cannabis can cause damage to blood vessels in the lungs. Eating too much cannabis or using high-THC products like e-liquids or extracts (also known as dabs) can cause cannabis poisoning. High THC use is connected to heart disease and stroke. Youth who begin cannabis use before age 25 are twice as likely as adults to experience cannabis use disorder, and may also struggle with learning, anxiety, memory, critical thinking and judgment.



**How can I help my kids understand cannabis use?** Just as you would with commonly used substances like alcohol and nicotine, it's important to have informed and open conversations about cannabis use with your kids, even if you use cannabis yourself. Parents can play an important role in helping their kids understand the impacts that substance use can have on their mental and physical health, so they can make informed decisions about the use of substances as they grow older.



**How can someone reduce the risks of cannabis use?** Avoid or limit use of cannabis before age 25 to allow the brain to fully develop. Look for lower THC-potent products; avoid cannabis extracts and e-liquids (known as dabs and vapes). Designate a sober driver before travelling, and avoid use of cannabis if you are currently or planning to be pregnant. Keep cannabis products out of reach of young children or pets, especially edible products. It is also recommended to avoid use if you are living with anxiety, bi-polar, psychosis or schizophrenia.



**Does cannabis cause psychosis?** Cannabis use has been linked to the development of psychosis and schizophrenia in vulnerable individuals with a family history of these disorders.<sup>7</sup> Teens that use cannabis are at 11 times higher risk of developing a psychotic disorder.<sup>8</sup> If you have a family history of psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or substance use disorders, it is recommended to avoid cannabis use, especially higher THC products.

## Reference List

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2. Government of Canada, 2025. [Canadian Student Alcohol And Drugs Survey, 2023-2024.](#)
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5. University of British Columbia, 2024. [National Drug Driving Study 2024.](#)
6. Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2022. [Hospital Stays for Harm Caused by Substance Use.](#)
7. Cannabis & Psychosis Program, retrieved July 2023. [Cannabis & Psychosis.](#)
8. CAMH, 2024. [New evidence suggests stronger link between teen cannabis use and psychotic disorders.](#)