

# Marijuana Use While Pregnant or Lactating

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## What is Marijuana?

Marijuana is the common name for the drug Cannabis. It refers to the dried stems, flowers, and leaves of the Cannabis Sativa or Cannabis Indica plant. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), a mind-altering chemical, is the primary active substance in marijuana. THC use may result in altered judgement, impaired memory, and/or mood changes.

Marijuana is one of the most commonly used addictive drugs after tobacco and alcohol.<sup>1</sup> Marijuana use during and after pregnancy *is increasing* nationwide. The increased legalization of marijuana for medical or adult recreational use may be giving people a false sense of safety.

A 2019 Warning, [U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory: Marijuana and the Developing Brain](#):

"No amount of marijuana use during pregnancy or adolescence is known to be safe. Until and unless more is known about the long-term impact, the safest choice of pregnant women and adolescents is not to use marijuana." —*Surgeon General VADM Jerome Adams*

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

## Things CPAs Should Know:

- Marijuana available today is much stronger than ever was and may be mixed with other substances.
- THC levels are often increased in the more concentrated forms; edibles, dabs, drinks, and/or vape pens.
- Physical dependence, addiction, and other negative consequences (anxiety, paranoia, psychosis) increase with exposure to higher THC concentrations.
- Marijuana use during pregnancy impacts fetal brain development and increases risk of low birth weight, preterm birth, and stillbirth.
- **THC can pass to the baby through the bloodstream into placenta and breastmilk. THC can be detected in infant's urine for 2-5 weeks after exposure. THC is stored in fat so it could continue to expose baby over time.**
- Since the infant is so small, there is an increased effect after exposure. There is particular concern regarding infant's long-term neurobehavioral development with continued use.
- Marijuana smoke has many of the same chemicals as tobacco smoke and may increase the risk of breathing problems for mom and developmental delays in baby.

## MARIJUANA USE WHILE PREGNANT OR LACTATING

- The *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)*, the *American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)*, and the *U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA)* all encourage the parent to abstain from marijuana use while pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding.<sup>2/3/4</sup>

Be aware that some pregnant women may get encouragement from family or friends to use marijuana to alleviate morning sickness or other health concerns. Additionally, if participants travel to states where marijuana is legal and widely available, they might assume it is safe.

WIC CPAs should inform participants that there is a lack of data on safety and of the potential risks with using marijuana as “medicine”. It is best practice to refer women to their health care provider for safe and FDA-approved treatments for symptoms related to nausea, depression, and pain.

### Associated Risk Factor

We inquire about the use of substances during the nutrition assessment. WIC MOM Policy [Section 6.4](#) requires WIC staff to inform participants of the potential harm that drugs and other substances can cause, *whether they report using or not*. Risk code [372- Alcohol and Substance Use](#) may be assigned during pregnancy or while breastfeeding in the following conditions:

- Any illegal substance use/or abuse of prescription medications.
- Any marijuana use in any form.

It is important to note that WIC’s role is to screen and refer but never to diagnose or counsel a participant regarding the use of substances.<sup>5</sup> When talking to a participant, keep assessment non-judgmental and education factual. Be sure to document what was discussed and what resources were provided.

### Training Tips (Group Activity):

Discussing topics such as marijuana 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 marijuana while pregnant or breastfeeding. Role-play a conversation about marijuana use during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Take turns playing the CPA and participant.
- **Share your experiences.** Has a participant ever informed you of their marijuana use? How did you handle it? What did you learn?

### Resources:

1. [Cannabis \(Marijuana\) DrugFacts](#) National Institute of Health (NIH)
2. [Marijuana and Pregnancy](#) ACOG

## MARIJUANA USE WHILE PREGNANT OR LACTATING

3. [Marijuana Use During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Implications for Neonatal and Childhood Outcomes](#) AAP
4. [What You Should Know About Using Cannabis, Including CBD, When Pregnant or Breastfeeding](#) FDA
5. [Substance Use Prevention Screening, Education, and Referral Resource Guide for Local WIC Agencies](#) USDA

### Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory: Marijuana and the Developing Brain](#)

(<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/addiction-and-substance-misuse/advisory-on-marijuana-use-and-developing-brain/index.html>)

[Section 6.4](#)

([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))

[372- Alcohol and Substance Use](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/372.html>)

[Cannabis \(Marijuana\) DrugFacts](#) (<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/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.>)

[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>)

[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>)

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