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Legal or not, marijuana and edibles should be stored away from kids

by Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Kids might be seeing marijuana in a more relaxed way now that it is legal for people ages 21 and older to smoke or eat it in several states. But the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is urging parents to talk with their teens about the harms of marijuana use, just like they would talk with them about drugs, alcohol, tobacco or e-cigarettes.

Even in states where marijuana is legal for medical or recreational reasons, the AAP advises against using or eating it in front of children.

"Seeing parents use marijuana makes kids more likely to use it themselves, whether or not their parents tell them not to, because actions speak louder than words," said Sheryl A. Ryan, M.D., FAAP, co-author of a new AAP report about marijuana.

Whether smoked or eaten, marijuana can cause intoxication in adults and children. People should not drive under the influence of marijuana or ride in a car driven by someone who has used it, according to the AAP.

Teens who use it can have learning, attention and memory problems as well as lung problems, according to the AAP.

Despite its effects, students' acceptance of marijuana is high, according to a recent survey of eighth-, 10th- and 12th-graders. In 2015, about 40% of teens consumed marijuana edibles in states where sales were legal and 28% tried them in states where edibles are illegal.

Marijuana plants and products have more of the active ingredient tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) than in the past. In 1995, marijuana had 4% THC and now it has about 20% THC.

Marijuana edibles look like regular food. However, a single edible often contains several serving sizes and a large amount of THC. Sometimes, edibles are in packages similar to popular treats. A child who accidentally eats a whole piece of the food can overdose. And because it takes up to three or four hours to feel the effects of edible marijuana, teens might eat more and overdose.

Signs of an overdose include anxiety, panic, paranoia, dizziness, weakness, heart problems and poor coordination.

The AAP advises the following to keep children safe:

- Keep marijuana products out of reach or locked away in child-resistant packaging. Clearly label edibles. Ask family or friends who use marijuana products to do the same.
- Talk with children about the dangers of marijuana and edibles to their health.
- If your child accidentally eats marijuana, call the poison control hotline at 1-800-222-1222. If symptoms are severe, call 911.

For more information, visit <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Edible-Marijuana-Dangers.aspx>.

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