



# Cannabis Legalization: Children and Young People

## Findings

- Significant evidence suggests that youth are more likely than adults to experience cannabis-related harms (Hosseini & Oremus, 2019; Kaur et al., 2022).
- Canadian youth consistently rank as the world's most prevalent and youngest cannabis consumers (Spithoff & Kahan, 2014).
- An objective of the *Cannabis Act* is to restrict young people's access and enticement to use cannabis.
- The 2021 Canadian Cannabis Survey (CCS) found past-year cannabis use had significantly decreased among youth ages 16–19 years from 44 per cent in 2020 to 37 per cent in 2021 (Health Canada, 2021).<sup>1</sup> In 2022, the past-year cannabis use rate remained the same at 37 per cent (Health Canada, 2022). However, not all surveys define “youth” the same, making the monitoring of use difficult across different studies.
- Having a minimum legal age of 19 years has shown promise in being an effective safeguard for young people's health and well-being (Nguyen et al., 2020; Health Canada 2021).
- While minimum legal age prevents underage youth from accessing legal retail of cannabis, it does not prevent access through other avenues (Sikorski, et al., 2021). This makes the illegal market a threat to youth.
- Since legalization, the rates of cannabis poisonings among children from cannabis edible products has increased (Myran et al., 2022). This rate is notably lower in Quebec where there are greater restrictions on edible cannabis products, particularly on chocolate, gummies and cookies (Myran et al. 2023).
- There was an increase in cannabis vaping among young people (Chadi et al., 2021; Fataar & Hammond, 2019; Health Canada, 2021).
- Plain packaging and health warnings reduce brand appeal and increase health knowledge among youth (Goodman et al., 2019; Leos-Toro et al., 2021; Mutti-Packer et al., 2018).

## Policy Considerations

There has not been enough time to fully understand the impacts of cannabis legalization. More time is needed to build concrete evidence. However, due to the high prevalence of use, it is too soon to

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<sup>1</sup> The Canadian Cannabis Survey may overrepresent people who use cannabis due to recruiting practices, which may show higher estimates than other surveys.



weaken or remove existing legislation and regulation that are in place to protect children and young people. Therefore, based on existing trends and evidence it is suggested that:

- Cannabis policies for children and young people should continue to emphasize preventing or delaying use.
- The appeal of cannabis edible products is restricted by the continued regulation of the marketing, packaging, and product content and design.
- The appeal of cannabis vaping is restricted by the continued regulation against the use of flavouring in cannabis extracts.

## CCSA Resources

[A Public Health Perspective on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation in Canada](#)

[Consultation on the Legislative Review of the Tobacco and Vaping Products Act](#)

[Cannabis Legalization: 2021-2022 Observations](#)

[Standing Committee on Health: Children's Health Brief](#)

## References

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