

## Marijuana, Children, & Families

### Colorado Children's Caucus

March 9, 2015

**Conclusion**

There is a clear need for increased research on the impact of marijuana on children's development. Efforts must be made to inform the public and increase awareness about the risks of children's exposure to marijuana and related products.

## Speakers

Dr. Kathryn Wells, Medical Director  
Denver Health Clinic at the Family Crisis Center  
Clinical Researcher, The Kempe Center

Jade Woodard, Executive Director  
Colorado Alliance for Drug Endangered Children  
Prevent Child Abuse Colorado

**Issues to Cover**

- Prenatal Marijuana Exposure
- Unintentional Ingestion
- Parenting Under the Influence
- Prevention & Education

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## Prenatal Marijuana Exposure

RESEARCH	LAW	PRACTICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no known safe amount of marijuana during pregnancy.</li> <li>• THC can pass from mother to the unborn child through the placenta. The unborn child is exposed to THC used by the mother.</li> <li>• There are negative effects of marijuana use during pregnancy regardless of when it is used during pregnancy.</li> <li>• Maternal use of marijuana during pregnancy is associated with negative effects on exposed children that may not appear until adolescence. The most negatively affected are academic ability, cognitive function and attention, which may not become evident until adolescence when these typically develop.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If pregnant women report their substance use to their prenatal health care provider, they have a positive drug test during a prenatal visit, Colorado law prevents that information from being used to criminalize the mother. (C.R.S. § 18-6-701)</li> <li>• Steroid/steroid-like (THC) both recreational and medical, is considered a Schedule I (drug under federal and Colorado law. (C.R.S. § 18-6-701)</li> <li>• Current Colorado law defines a baby testing positive as both for a Schedule I substance (including recreational or medical THC) or other drugs as an indicator of child abuse or neglect, which requires a report to social services. (C.R.S. § 18-6-701)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of uniform hospital policies and practices surrounding:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Third-party screening of pregnant women for substance use</li> <li>- Drug testing mother and infants at time of delivery</li> <li>- Child welfare mandatory reporting process and medical provider follow-up regarding relationship</li> </ul> </li> <li>• New guidance released by CDPH on Marijuana Use During Pregnancy is Reorienting the Healthcare Providers &amp; Patients. Visit: <a href="http://bit.ly/1W38141">http://bit.ly/1W38141</a></li> <li>• Substance abuse treatment for pregnant women is available, though currently underutilized.</li> </ul>

**Areas of Opportunity**

More research is needed on marijuana use during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

There is currently no quantitative data available on the scope of this issue.

Distinguish between medical vs recreational use for babies testing positive - would require current medical provider analysis of risks and benefits of medical marijuana use during pregnancy and recommended dosages.

Include babies testing positive for alcohol above a certain level as child abuse or neglect.

Increase consistency in hospital policies and practices regarding testing mothers and infants at time of birth.

Provide appropriate education, support, and intervention for families with a prenatally exposed infant.

## RESEARCH

- There is no known safe amount of marijuana during pregnancy.
- THC can pass from mother to the unborn child through the placenta. The unborn child is exposed to THC used by the mother.
- There are negative effects of marijuana use during pregnancy regardless of when it is used during pregnancy
- Maternal use of marijuana during pregnancy is associated with negative effects on exposed children that may not appear until adolescence. The most negatively affected are academic ability, cognitive function and attention, which may not become evident until adolescence when these typically develop

# LAW

If pregnant women report their substance use to their prenatal health care provider and/or have a positive drug test during a prenatal care visit, Colorado law prevents that information from being used in criminal prosecution. (C.R.S. § 13-25-136)

Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), both recreational and medical, is considered a Schedule 1 drug under federal and Colorado law. (C.R.S. § 18-18-203)

Current Colorado law defines a baby testing positive at birth for a Schedule I substance (including recreational or medical THC or other drugs) as an instance of child abuse or neglect, which requires a report to social services. (C.R.S. § 19-3-102)

# PRACTICE

Lack of uniform hospital policies and practices surrounding:

- Verbal screening of pregnant women for substance use
- Drug testing women and infants at time of delivery
- Child welfare mandatory reporting process and medical provider follow up/ongoing relationship

New guidance released by CDPHE on Marijuana Use During Pregnancy & Breastfeeding for Healthcare Providers & Patients.

Visit - [bit.ly/CDPHE\\_MJclinicalguidance](http://bit.ly/CDPHE_MJclinicalguidance)

Substance abuse treatment for pregnant women is available, though currently underutilized.

## Areas of Opportunity

More research is needed on marijuana use during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

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## Unintentional Ingestion of Marijuana



- Children's Hospital Colorado & Rocky Mountain Poison Control report drastic increases in unintentional marijuana ingestions - most frequently from edible products in children under 5
- ? Marijuana edible products are not clearly identifiable from regular food products.
- 🔒 Retail edible products are required to be sold in child resistant packaging.
- 🗣️ Parents need additional education on danger to kids and need for safe storage practices.



- Concerns persist about the safety of marijuana cultivation and production in homes.
- + Parental health concerns with indoor marijuana cultivation based on size and management of grow.
- 🔥 Fire and explosion risks with indoor grow production in homes pose safety concerns.
- 🏠 Homemade edible products - no packaging, no labels, and anecdotal reports suggest that many of the edibles consumed by children are homemade and not stored safely.

Limited Data



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Concerns persist about the safety of marijuana cultivation and production in homes.

- + Potential health concerns with indoor marijuana cultivation based on size and management of grow.
- 🔥 Fire and explosion risks with butane hash oil production in homes pose safety concerns.
- ☠️ Homemade edible products - no packaging, no limits, and anecdotal reports suggest that many of the edibles accessed by children are homemade and not stored safely.

# Limited Data

Not all hospitals track or report data  
 Not all ingestions are seen medically  
 Impact on hospitals and medical providers  
 Follow up difficulty - ongoing relationship



### *Parenting Under the Influence*

**When is parental use of marijuana child abuse or neglect?**  
 When there is an act or omission that threatens the health or welfare of the child.

**What does this look like?**

Lack of Supervision	Unsafe Living Conditions
Lack of Necessities	Access to Substances
Impaired Caregivers	Physical or Sexual Abuse

Is driving under the influence with a child in the car child abuse or neglect?

Implicitly, yes.  
Not explicitly defined or consistently charged / reported.

Is it child abuse for a child to unintentionally ingest an edible marijuana product?

Implicitly, yes.  
Not explicitly defined or consistently charged / reported.

How many children in Colorado are abused or neglected as a result of parental drug use?

Colorado child abuse hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD

Is medical marijuana allowed for the treatment of children in terms of child abuse?

Medical marijuana is not explicitly defined as child abuse. However, if it causes harm to the child, it could be considered child abuse.

How does marijuana affect the child's development?

Marijuana use during pregnancy and breastfeeding can affect the child's development. It can lead to low birth weight, preterm birth, and developmental delays.

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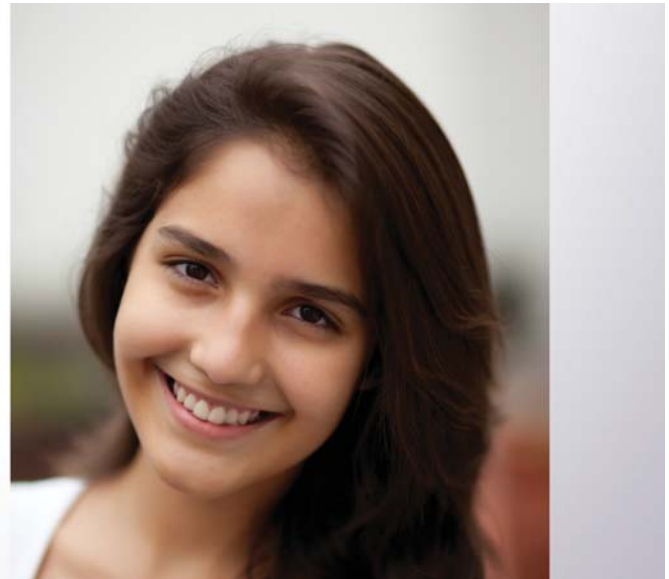
Unknown - unable to pull data from Trails and no clear definition of a drug endangered child.

**Is medical marijuana different from recreational marijuana in terms of child abuse?**

Not according to the law. It depends on the impact to the child.

**How does marijuana differ from other medical & recreational substances?**

- Home cultivation/manufacturing.
- Appeal of edible products to children.
- Same concerns around parental impairment and a safe environment apply to all medical and recreational substances.



**Prevention & Education**

**How can we prevent child abuse with marijuana use in Colorado?**

Educate parents, educators, and other family serving agencies about marijuana, the laws, and ways to ensure children are safe and healthy throughout childhood



Resources -  
[www.colorado.gov/marijuana](http://www.colorado.gov/marijuana)  
[www.goodtoknowcolorado.com](http://www.goodtoknowcolorado.com)  
[www.smartchoicesafekids.org](http://www.smartchoicesafekids.org) - coming April 22nd!

**Healthy Babies:**

- Marijuana use – both inhaled and edible forms – should be avoided during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- If you use marijuana for medical purposes, discuss the risks, benefits and any possible alternatives with your prenatal care provider.
- Help is available - 1-800-Children & 1-866-LasFamilias





**Every child needs a safe, appropriate caregiver:**

- Provide appropriate supervision, nutrition, emotional connection
- Crisis Ready – able to respond and ensure child health, safety, and well being in any situation



**Safe Homes:**

- Practice safe storage of all marijuana, marijuana products, and paraphernalia. Keep products in their original packaging, locked, out of sight and out of reach.
- Keep your homes free from illegal drug dealing, unsafe cultivation, hash oil labs, violence, strangers, and criminal activity



**Prevent Teen Use:**

- Educate yourself and your children about all substances, including marijuana, the laws and the impacts on the developing brain
- Be a good role model
- Don't be afraid of the conversation

**Resources -**

[www.colorado.gov/marijuana](http://www.colorado.gov/marijuana)

[www.goodtoknowcolorado.com](http://www.goodtoknowcolorado.com)

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**Conclusion**

- There is a lack of data on the true scope of the impacts of marijuana on children and families.
- Opportunities exist to update law, policy, and practice to increase health and safety of children.
- Parents and professionals need additional education on marijuana and child safety.

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There is a lack of data on the true scope of the impacts of marijuana on children and families. Opportunities exist to update law, policy, and practice to increase health and safety of children. Parents and professionals need additional education on marijuana and child safety.