DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Second and Thirdhand Cannabis Smoke

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM PARENTS

Parents want the best for their children. As access to legal cannabis products increases throughout Minnesota, many parents have questions about the safety of second and thirdhand cannabis smoke around their children. More research on second and thirdhand cannabis smoke is still needed, but here is what we do know.

What is secondhand cannabis smoke?

Secondhand cannabis smoke is the smoke that comes off a lit cannabis product (e.g., joint, blunt, bowl, pipe, or spliff) that is inhaled involuntarily by a person or people nearby.

What is thirdhand cannabis smoke?

Thirdhand cannabis smoke is the chemical residue left behind on surfaces and fabrics as secondhand cannabis smoke settles.

Is secondhand cannabis smoke harmful?

While legal cannabis products undergo testing for several contaminants, smoking of any kind carries health risks. Children are especially susceptible to contaminants in smoke and face developmental risks from exposure.

Like secondhand commercial tobacco smoke, secondhand cannabis smoke comes from burning plant material. Studies have shown that cannabis smoke has some of the same risks as commercial tobacco smoke (Graves, et al. 2020). Secondhand cannabis smoke also contains many of the same toxic and cancer-causing chemicals, some even occurring in higher amounts (Moir et al. 2008; Thirdhand Smoke Resource Center, 2025; Tripathi et al. 2025).

Depending on how the cannabis is prepared before being smoked, other harmful substances may also be present. The type of rolling paper used, as well as additives like tobacco or flavoring, can also impact what is in the smoke. Early research shows that children who live in a home with indoor cannabis smoke are more likely to have health impacts like ear infections, asthma, respiratory issues, and skin conditions (Posis et al. 2019).

Can secondhand cannabis smoke cause a “high?”

Secondhand cannabis smoke can contain tetrahydrocannabinol (also known as THC), the chemical responsible for feeling “high.” THC can be passed through secondhand smoke to

children and infants. People exposed to secondhand smoke can experience feeling “high” (Wilson et al. 2017; Cone et al. 2015).

Is thirdhand cannabis smoke harmful?

Similar to commercial tobacco smoke, thirdhand cannabis smoke contains toxic chemicals, which can linger for years in dust and objects like toys, furniture, carpet, and clothing (Yeh et al. 2022). Babies and children are exposed to these chemicals at higher rates because they crawl on the floor and put things in their mouth.

How can I protect my child from second and thirdhand cannabis smoke?

- Do not smoke cannabis around your child.
- Do not smoke in your home or car. Thirdhand smoke can linger in homes and cars. If you do smoke, smoke outside, where it is legal to do so.
- After smoking, change your clothes and wash your hands.
- If smoking has occurred indoors, reduce thirdhand smoke exposure by (Thirdhand Smoke Resource Center, 2020):
    - Vacuuming, with a HEPA filter, all soft furnishings and floors.
    - Dusting or mopping all hard surfaces.
    - Wiping tabletops, doors, cabinets, and chairs.
    - Cleaning toys and children’s items.
    - Washing pillowcases, blankets, and drapery.

References

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