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## Today's Marijuana is "More Potent" and May be More Dangerous, Says New Research

Experts reveal what to know about high potency cannabis and its dangerous side effects.



By [Heather Newgen](#) / Published on November 18, 2022 | 7:15 AM

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[EMILIA PALUSZEK](#)



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Using marijuana for medicinal purposes has been proven to provide beneficial results for many health issues such as reducing the frequency of seizures, treating GI problems, reducing inflammation, treating anxiety and more. According to the [National Conference of State](#), "37 states, three territories and the District of Columbia allow the medical use of cannabis products." In addition, 21 states have legalized the adult use of marijuana for recreational purposes, but researchers are warning that the use of high-potency products can be dangerous.

[USC Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics](#) states, "High-potency cannabis products have been linked to short-term memory and coordination issues, impaired cognitive functions, cannabis hyperemesis syndrome, psychosis, and increased risks of anxiety, depression and dependence when used for prolonged periods. Acute health effects associated with high-potency products include unexpected poisonings and acute psychosis."

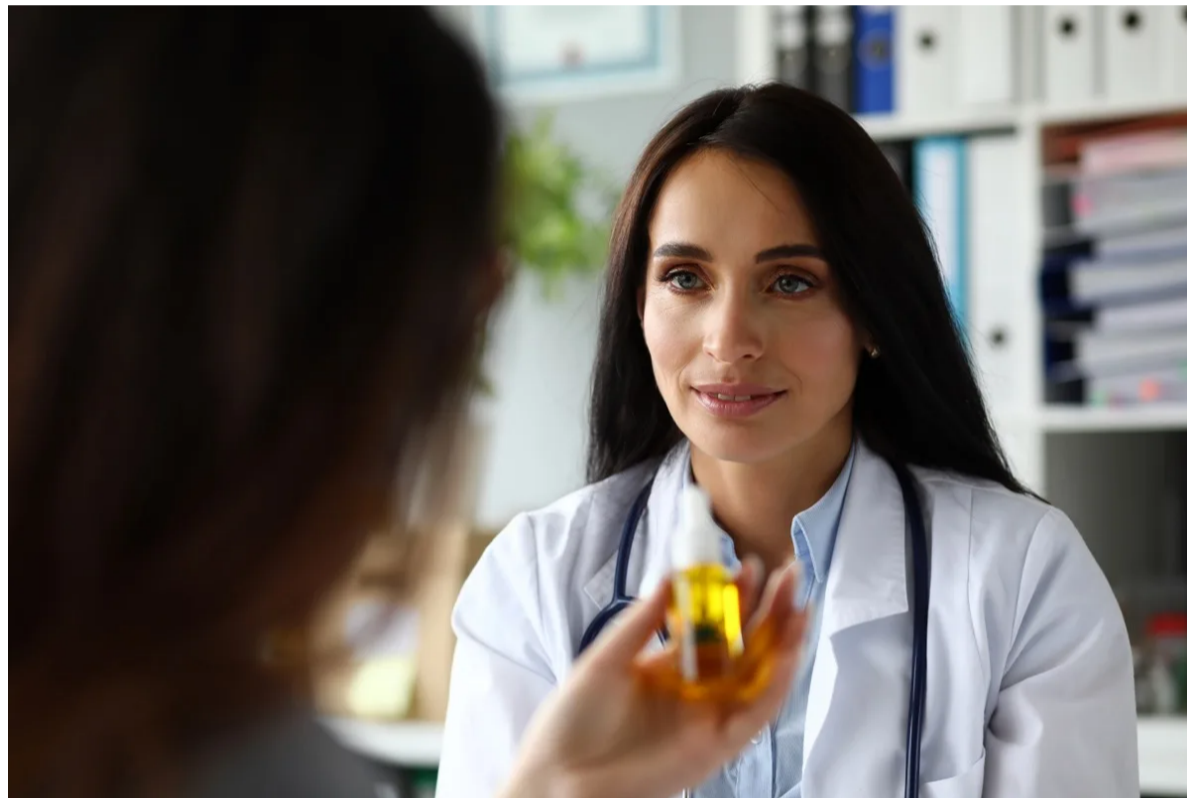
[Seattle Times](#) reports a form of cannabis called a dab is "sold in Washington containing as much as 90%" THC. "Such products are setting off alarm bells for physicians and a group of research scientists in the Pacific Northwest, who see the wide availability of dabs and other highly concentrated substances as a quiet but growing threat to public health, especially among young adults and teenagers." Health officials and

products," according to the Seattle times. "However, retailers and suppliers point out that these products are already illegal for those under 21. And they warn that bans or increasing taxes on certain products could spur the growth of an illegal market that would be significantly more difficult to monitor and control."

Eat This, Not That! Health spoke with experts who explain what to know about high potency cannabis and damaging side effects that could happen as a result of taking it. Read on—and to ensure your health and the health of others, don't miss these [Sure Signs You've Already Had COVID.](#)

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## What's Considered High Potency Cannabis



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Anil Sharma, MD Chairman, Dept. of Psychiatry, [Dignity Northridge Medical Center](#) and Mitali Wadekar, MD Medical Director, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Dignity Northridge Hospital tell us, "High-potency cannabis is generally considered one that contains more than 20% THC or 10 mg or more of THC per serving. However, the concept of potency can vary significantly in the highly competitive industry these days, with some cannabis concentrates containing as much as 90-95%THC. We have seen a steady increase in THC content, from 4 percent in the 90's to now 10-25 percent being most common to up to 80-95% percent in some extracts/concentrates. Manufacturers are modifying cannabis and oftentimes it is not the natural marijuana that people think they are using. Many of these high potency compounds are synthetically manufactured or significantly altered leading to an instant "high".

[Joseph S. Haraszti](#), MD, Board Certified Psychiatrist, Board Certified in Addiction Medicine, [Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry USC KECK School of Medicine](#) says, "High potency cannabis is something that has gradually developed in a largely unregulated 20 billion industry, since the legalization of marijuana. Between 1960 to 1980, marijuana contained approximately 2% THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol), the active ingredient of marijuana. Since then, the potency has steadily increased to 17 to 28% in 2017. The advent of dabs, shatter, wax and vaping has exponentially increased the potency of THC, and hence the potential for mental health issues and neurocognitive damage."

## 2 Cannabis is NOT the Same Weed Used Before, According to Experts



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Dr. Sharma and Dr. Wadekar explain, "Because of the huge variation of what and how much is considered high potency cannabis, it is difficult to quantitatively estimate how much is too much. It is important to remember that cannabis is no longer the same 'weed' or 'pot' used back in the day, which was considered natural" that had a potency of no more than 5 -10 percent. It is a completely different drug today. High potency does not necessarily mean high quality in this industry. There is a huge race to grow and sell cannabis products that provide a 'bigger high'.

When cannabis is genetically or otherwise altered to generate concentrates, you may lose some of the other active ingredients that may help balance some of the negative effects on one's brain and body, making it much more addictive. We are seeing a higher and higher number of cannabis users needing emergency room visits than before. Higher potency of THC vapors have shown to cause respiratory problems, loss of consciousness, psychosis among other health risks. Some states have capped the sale and use of cannabis products to a maximum THC potency of 30%."

## 3 What to Know About Dabs



Dr. Haraszti explains, "Dabs is a highly concentrated form of THC. It is produced by heating marijuana on a metal surface and inhaling the concentrated vapor through a rig. This process results in a very concentrated form of marijuana, increasing the risk of mental health effects (psychosis, suicidal thinking, anxiety and depression) as well as physiological effects, (coughing, shortness of breath and difficulty moving). Since the marijuana used to produce the dabs contains butane, a toxic and highly flammable chemical, there is the added danger of poisoning and explosions."

According to Dr. Sharma and Dr. Wadekar, "The practice of dabbing refers to smoking THC-rich resins extracted from the marijuana plant. These extracts come in various forms, such as:

- hash oil or honey oil – a sticky liquid
- wax or budder – a soft sticky solid
- cake batter – a raw honey like goo
- shatter – a hard, amber-colored solid like broken glass

These products are made using butane (a highly inflammable lighter fluid) and contain extremely large percentages of THC and their use is extremely dangerous with serious health implications."

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## How High Potency Cannabis Affect Mental Health



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Dr. Sharma and Dr. Wadekar state, "There is enough scientific evidence showing a multitude of mental health problems caused by high potency cannabis ranging from memory deficits to depression, anxiety, or even acute psychosis. Indirect effects can include relationship problems, lower academic and work performance, social isolation among others. There is a definite rise in the number of emergency room visits with acute and serious psychiatric issues, with the use of high potency cannabis in recent years."

Dr. Haraszti says, "The marijuana of old used to be classified as a hallucinogen and was thought to not cause addiction because there was no identified withdrawal syndrome. This has changed and with the increased potency of THC there is a definite recognized withdrawal syndrome which

who experiment with marijuana will become addicted; 17% of those who start using marijuana as teenagers will become addicted; and 25–50% of those who use daily will become addicted. Among the important mental health effects is the increase in the onset of psychosis. There is a five fold increase in first onset psychosis in adolescent marijuana users. There is also a marked increase in depression and suicidal behavior in marijuana using teens."

## 5 High Potency Cannabis can be Detrimental for Young Adults and Teenagers



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Dr. Sharma and Dr. Wadekar say, "Exposure at a younger age can certainly have more serious implications on one's health as well as social life. According to a [study](#), "people who begin using marijuana before age 18 are four to seven times more likely than adults to develop a marijuana use disorder." Individuals who use high potency marijuana with THC concentrations of greater 10 percent are more likely than non-users to be diagnosed with a psychotic disorder, such as schizophrenia. Long-term use, starting in the teenage years, when the brain is still developing may lead to more social difficulties with relationships, academic and work-related problems and poor mental health outcomes. Long-term cannabis use can cause lung and heart problems and various other cognitive deficits."

According to Dr. Haraszti, "The most vulnerable population to be affected by the dangers of marijuana are adolescents and young adults. Since the legalization of marijuana, there has been a 65% increase in marijuana use in Colorado teenagers, between ages 12 to 17. Adolescence is a time of significant brain development. The human brain is not fully developed until around age 25. The most important part is the prefrontal cortex, which is the seat of executive function and judgment. Marijuana significantly affects this part of the brain, impairing this most important function. A [New Zealand study](#) found that daily use of marijuana causes an 8 point drop in IQ. This has a major impact on future success in all areas of life."

## Regulations Such as a THC Cap on High Potency Cannabis

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Dr. Haraszti says, "The cannabis industry is largely unregulated. All but 13 states have legalized marijuana, despite the fact that the federal government has a policy of interdiction. This most likely will soon change. Vermont is the only state that has placed a cap on the potency of marijuana.

Clearly given the obvious harm that it has caused for at least one segment of our society, our teens, there should be some types of regulatory control.

Among possible controls:

1. Placing a cap on the potency of cannabis products sold. (Flower, concentrates and extracts).
2. Designing a tax structure, similar to alcohol, based on potency rather than by container weight or retail price.
3. Limiting the sale to anyone under 21 years of age.

The potency of marijuana has steadily increased since it was legalized in the 1990's. This has created a multibillion dollar industry across the U.S. Despite its known addictive potential and neurocognitive effects on the developing brain, as well as the documented increase in the incidence of psychosis, anxiety, depression, suicide and lowered IQ, there has been no public health movement to stop this developing pandemic. Regulatory agencies need to step up and address this problem, which is affecting the most vulnerable segment of our population."

Dr. Sharma and Dr. Wadekar explain, "Most of the current state regulations in the US are simply not enough for protecting vulnerable populations who are more susceptible to addiction and other harm. While some states do place limits on cannabis sales based on product weight and type, people end up acquiring high potency cannabis to get "more bang for their buck", which defeats the purpose. Furthermore, there is a need for additional research on the short and long term effects of the various types and potencies on the human body and brain that can assist in better regulations surrounding the sale and use of cannabis.

Limits or caps on THC amount and potency in individual product sales, along with stringent monitoring of the supply chain might be necessary for regulators to consider. Cannabis products targeting sales to minors such as

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product may help deter the use and sale of products containing dangerously high levels of THC."

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#### Heather Newgen

Heather Newgen has two decades of experience reporting and writing about health, fitness, entertainment and travel. Heather currently freelances for several publications. [Read more about Heather](#)

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