Poison Center Calls About Cannabis Edibles Rising

Edibles are foods and beverages infused with concentrated cannabis (marijuana) extracts. A wide variety of products are available including candy, gummies, baked goods, gum, chips...even hot sauce and beer. In theory, edibles can only be purchased from regulated marketplaces by people living in states where recreational cannabis is legal. In practice, these products are widely available on the black market and online.

What is the concern?
When cannabis is smoked or vaped, effects are almost immediate and last up to a few hours. By comparison, when cannabis is swallowed, the intoxicating effects can be delayed by up to 2 hours, and may last longer—up to 8 hours. This can catch users by surprise. Also, edibles are very potent and the dosing is tricky. One recommended serving might be only one piece of candy or 1/2 of a cookie. People who consume more than they intended can experience unpleasant, or even dangerous, symptoms. These symptoms may include:

- High level of anxiety or paranoia
- Difficulty moving or speaking
- Nausea and vomiting
- Confusion and memory problems
- Rapid heart rate
- Extreme sleepiness
- Breathing problems

Another concern is how tempting edibles are to children because they resemble familiar treats. Dr. Christopher Holstege, Director of UVA Health’s Blue Ridge Poison Center and Emergency Department physician, says “Children who consume edibles often need to be cared for in a hospital because their... continued next page

POISON TRIVIA
The parents of this Grammy-winning recording artist were found dead in their home in 2004—tragic victims of carbon monoxide poisoning. Who is the recording artist?

Answer on page 3
symptoms are so severe. The number of calls to poison centers and emergency department visits due to children who got into edibles is skyrocketing.

Can you buy edibles in Virginia?
In Virginia, it is now legal to possess one ounce of cannabis containing Delta-9 THC, the chemical compound found naturally in the cannabis plant and responsible for its psychoactive effects. It is also legal to grow cannabis for personal use (some rules apply). However, it remains illegal to buy or sell cannabis with Delta-9 THC in any form, including edibles, unless you have a prescription and are buying it for medical reasons.

Until recently, Virginians could take advantage of a legal loophole which allowed them to make, sell, and buy products infused with a chemical compound called Delta-8 THC, which is very similar to Delta-9 THC and has similar psychoactive effects. Delta-8 THC is found in the hemp plant, which has been legal to grow since 2018. Hemp contains only trace amounts of Delta-8 THC. Because this amount is so low, hemp does not have any intoxicating properties. In other words, smoking, vaping, or eating hemp cannot cause a ‘high.’ The only way to experience any effects is to extract it from the plant and concentrate it. This concentrated chemical is then sprayed on-- or mixed into-- candies, cookies, or other products.

On July 1, 2022, Virginia banned “the sale, distribution, and manufacture of hemp-derived delta-8 THC food and beverages,” because Delta-8 is an illegal food adulterant. This puts edible products with Delta-8 THC in violation of the Food and Beverage Act. The ban is new, and enforcement has been slow. Delta-8 THC edibles can still be found for sale, which can lead consumers to wrongly assume they are safe and legal.

Why are health officials concerned about Delta-8?
- Delta-8 THC products are so new, it is unclear how they might affect the brain long term.
- Users are consuming Delta-8 THC in amounts much higher than found in nature.
- There are numerous reports of people having adverse health effects from Delta-8 THC.

What adverse health effects have been reported with Delta-8 THC?
- Nausea and vomiting
- Difficulty moving and speaking
- Hallucinations
- Anxiety and increased heart rate
- Loss of consciousness

“Consumers have no idea what they are really putting into their body.”
—Christopher Holstege, MD

Delta 8 THC products are unregulated. Why is this a problem?
Unregulated edible products have not been evaluated, tested, or approved to be safe. They may be produced in unsanitary conditions. There is no oversight of the
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manufacturing process, which involves harsh chemicals including butane, acids, and solvents. Sometimes these chemicals end up in the finished product. Other contaminants have been found in Delta-8 edibles including mold, hair, and unlisted other drugs.

Some packages of Delta-8 edibles feature a QR code which links to a lab report promising to show the “purity” and potency of the product. These lab reports have been found to be inaccurate at best. Sometimes they are downright phony.

Dr. Holstege has cared for many patients sickened by Delta-8 THC edibles. “As with any unregulated substance, consumers have no idea what they are really putting into their body or how it might affect them,” he says.

What else do our toxicologists want you to know?
- There are other similar chemical compounds being used to make edibles including Delta-10, THC-O, and THC-P. All are unregulated and illegal in Virginia.
- Consuming Delta-8 THC will result in a positive urine drug screen.
- THC in any form affects children and adolescents differently than adults, and has been linked to problems with learning, behavior, and mental health. This is because the brain is still growing and developing until around age 24.

Who can help?
Anyone experiencing negative effects after consuming any THC product should call the Blue Ridge Poison Center: 1-800-222-1222. Our experts have the most up-to-date knowledge about treating adverse health effects from cannabis products. The call is free and confidential.

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Poison Safety Tips & More! www.brpc.virginia.edu @blueridgepoison Find us on Facebook

RAFFLE WINNERS ANNOUNCED
Congratulations to the winners of our newsletter survey raffle!
- Angela DeLaughter
- Beth Hutchison
- Mary Mitchell
- Shilynn Amos

We received a lot of valuable feedback about this newsletter, and will be implementing your suggestions in the upcoming February issue. Thank you to all who participated. Watch the drawing on YouTube.
Poison-Proof Your Holidays

The holidays are particularly full of opportunities for poisoning accidents. Plan ahead with these tips to protect your family:

Provide guests with a safe place to store purses, suitcases, and toiletries.
Guests may bring prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, and personal products like mouthwash, eye drops, or cologne into your home and leave them in easy-to-reach places. Guests may also bring nicotine products or cannabis products with their belongings. Many of these products can be harmful to a child if swallowed or handled.

Keep an eye on alcoholic beverages if children are around.
Even a small amount of alcohol can be deadly to a child. Don’t leave alcoholic beverages unattended. Store alcohol in a locked cabinet out of the sight and reach of children.

Keep holiday plants away from very young children.
Holiday plants such as mistletoe, holly berries, paperwhites, and Jerusalem Cherry could be toxic if swallowed. Poinsettias were once thought to be toxic but are now widely accepted as non-toxic. However, like any plant, they could pose a choking hazard or irritation to the mouth and throat.

Beware of Disc Batteries (also called button batteries)
These tiny, flat, shiny batteries are commonly used in games and toys which light up or make noise. They are also found in remote control devices, hearing aids, and numerous other items. If swallowed, button batteries can become stuck, causing serious life-threatening burns.

Keep Pets Safe, too
Many things that are not harmful for humans are poisonous to pets even in small amounts, including: chocolate, raisins, lilies, and some over-the-counter pain medicines. Visit the website of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals www.aspca.org for a complete list and other holiday safety tips for pet owners: www.aspca.org.

Protect yourself from poisoning
Adults are at risk for poisoning, too. Most adult poisonings happen when someone is not paying attention and they swallow something they shouldn’t have swallowed or they make a mistake with their medicines. Keep yourself safe! Don’t take medicine in the dark and read labels carefully. If you regularly take medicine, make a plan to help you stick to your schedule even when traveling.

Share FREE poison center magnets or wallet cards with your loved ones. The toll-free number works everywhere in the U.S. Order online: www.brpc.virginia.edu

Be prepared!
Keep the Blue Ridge Poison Center’s toll-free number programmed in your smartphone. We are open on holidays! 1-800-222-1222.