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# THE ANTIDOTE

News and Notes from the Blue Ridge Poison Center

## Calls to Poison Centers About Psilocybin Rose After Decriminalization

Calls to U.S. poison centers about young people ages 13-25 and the hallucinogenic drug *psilocybin* rose sharply after some cities and states began decriminalizing the drug, according to researchers at University of Virginia Health and the Blue Ridge Poison Center. Their findings were published in the May 2024 issue of the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#).



Dried psilocybin mushrooms

### What is psilocybin?

*Psilocybin* (pronounced sill-oh-SY-bin) is a hallucinogenic compound found naturally in certain types of mushrooms. For centuries, indigenous and tribal communities across the globe have used psilocybin for spiritual, ceremonial and other purposes. Also known as “shrooms” or “magic mushrooms,” the mushrooms have a long history as a substance of misuse for their hallucinogenic effects.

Psilocybin can cause people to experience distorted sights and sounds and lose their sense of time and space. People who take psilocybin may also feel intense emotions ranging from euphoria to anxiety to intense fear. This experience is sometimes called a “trip.” Users may also experience problems with judgment and perception, which can lead to risk-taking behavior, accidents, self-harming and even a risk of suicide. There are reports of deaths from falls or jumps from tall buildings attributed to psilocybin use. Psilocybin may cause physical side effects as well, including increased heart rate, nausea and vomiting, dilated pupils, and possibly seizures.

Traditionally the mushrooms are eaten fresh or dried. They may also be brewed to make a tea, added to other foods, or ground into a powder and packaged in capsules. Recently, some cannabis dispensaries and online shops have been selling gummies, candy bars, and other foods that are reportedly laced with psilocybin.

### What is ‘decriminalization’

A decriminalized drug may still be illegal to produce, sell, or possess. But people caught using it will no longer be

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Example of a candy bar which claims to contain psilocybin.

arrested or imprisoned. Instead, offenders may face a fine or require drug treatment/education. A drug that is decriminalized by a state may still be illegal at the federal level.

To date, psilocybin has been decriminalized in Oregon and Colorado, as well as the cities of Washington, D.C., Detroit, and Seattle. In January 2023, Virginia House Republicans voted down [a bill](#) that would have allowed Virginia doctors to prescribe psilocybin for treatment of a small set of mental health conditions.

“The increase in psilocybin misuse among teenagers is particularly alarming, because states and cities that have decriminalized psilocybin still prohibit anyone younger than 21 from using it,” says Rita Farah, Pharm.D, Ph.D., M.P.H., epidemiologist for the Blue Ridge Poison Center. “And yet, they seem to be getting their hands on it. As psilocybin may become more widely available, it is important for parents to be aware that psilocybin is now available in edible forms such as chocolate and gummies,” Farah adds. “We


learned from our experience with edible cannabis that young children can mistake edibles for candy.” As with all drugs and drug products, psilocybin mushrooms or products must be kept out of the sight and reach of children--preferably in a locked container.

One final note of caution: psilocybin-containing mushrooms look similar to other types of poisonous mushrooms which could cause serious illness or death if eaten by mistake.

For more information, check out these resources:

- The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency Psilocybin [factsheet](#).
- The National Institute on Drug Abuse [factsheet](#).

## POISON TRIVIA



TRUE or FALSE? The artificial sweetener *xylitol*, found in many sugarless candies and gums, is toxic to dogs.

Answer on page 4

## The ‘Farm Bill Loophole’: What is it, and why should we be concerned?

The [Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America](#) (CADCA) is urging people to ask Congress to close the “Farm Bill” loophole.

### Background

The [Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018](#), often referred to as the Farm Bill, defined cannabis plants as either *hemp* or *marijuana*, depending on their concentration of delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol, or delta-9 THC, by dry weight:

*Hemp:* Cannabis plants and products with a delta-9 THC concentration of no more than 0.3 percent on a dry weight basis.

*Marijuana:* Cannabis plants and products with a delta-9 THC concentration greater than 0.3 percent on a dry weight basis.

Delta-9 THC is one of many types of chemical compounds found naturally in cannabis plants called *cannabinoids*. Delta-9 THC is the cannabinoid that gives cannabis (marijuana) its psychoactive properties. In other words, consuming products with a high concentration of delta-9 THC can cause intoxication--sometimes called a 'high.'

The amount of delta-9 THC in hemp, however, is so low that it does not have any psychoactive properties. In other words, smoking, vaping, or eating hemp cannot cause intoxication. Prior to the Farm Bill, it was illegal to grow or sell hemp. The Farm Bill changed that. Hemp is used to make products like rope, clothing, animal feed, and more.

On the left: real candy. On the right: a product that reportedly contains delta-8 THC, a hemp-derived intoxicating compound. It is difficult to tell the difference, especially for children.

*Image source: Blue Ridge Poison Center*



### What is the loophole?

Deregulating hemp meant it became legal to extract and manipulate other cannabinoids present in the hemp plant and artificially concentrate them into amounts much higher than exist naturally. Names of the hemp-derived cannabinoids include delta-8 THC, delta-10 THC, THC-O, THCA, THC-B, HHC-P, and more. These concentrated compounds can be added to products which can be smoked, vaped, or eaten. Delta-8 THC and other hemp-derived cannabinoid products are commonly sold at gas stations, smoke shops, bodegas and online. When consumed, they can cause intoxication. *The widespread production of these intoxicating products was never the intent of the 2018 Farm Bill.*

**What are the concerns?** According to a [report issued by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA):

- These products have not been evaluated by the FDA and are not considered safe to use.
- There is no oversight to guarantee how pure or how potent (strong) these products are. When tested in a lab, many are found to be contaminated with solvents, acids, heavy metals, mold, and other harmful chemicals.
- Many products are packaged and marketed in ways that appeal to children. See the images above for an example.
- The FDA, healthcare providers, and U.S. poison centers have all received numerous reports about people; including children; experiencing adverse health effects from using these products.
- Individuals who use products containing delta-8 or other hemp-derived cannabinoids may think the products do not have any psychoactive properties because they are labeled as a hemp product. This may result in people experiencing unwanted health effects, and drug screenings which are positive for marijuana.

Poison Trivia answer: TRUE. Xylitol is extremely toxic to dogs. Even small amounts of xylitol can cause hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), seizures, liver failure, or even death in dogs. For more information visit this [FDA website](#) or visit the [ASPCA Animal Poison Control webpage](#).



Hemp plant. Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### What are the adverse health effects?

[Adverse short-term health effects](#) associated with hemp-derived cannabinoids can include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Difficulty moving and speaking
- Hallucinations
- Anxiety and increased heart rate
- Loss of consciousness

### Can regulation help?

There is evidence that legislation can protect people from harm. In July of 2023, [a law went into effect](#) which requires CBD and THC products to have clear labels that disclose ingredients and places limits on the potency, or strength of CBD and THC in products. [According to the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association](#), immediately after the new law went into effect, Virginia emergency rooms saw a **21.5% decrease** in cannabis-related emergency visits by children. In the several years prior to the new law, emergency visits from children who got into cannabis (particularly in the form of edibles) had been sharply rising.

### I have concerns. What can I do?

- Visit [Cannabis Conversations](#)—a toolkit produced by the Prevention Coalition with information and tips for adults on talking with youth about marijuana.
- Individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders can call SAMHSA's [National Helpline](#) 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish).
- [Contact your elected representatives](#) asking that the Farm Bill loophole be closed *making the production, sale, and use of hemp-derived cannabinoids illegal*.

[CLICK HERE](#) for a list of sources cited in this and other articles about cannabis referenced by the Blue Ridge Poison Center.

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