

# Powered by the Colorado School of Public Health

















# The Tea on THC Campaign Overview

The high-concentration marijuana products of today contain much higher levels of the psychoactive ingredient THC than products of the past.

To learn more about this trend, the Colorado General Assembly directed the Colorado School of Public Health to review the scientific literature on the prevalence and health effects of high concentration cannabis use, make recommendations to the legislature, and create a public health awareness campaign.

The "Tea on THC" campaign will arm Coloradans with facts and real-world testimonials to raise awareness, encourage dialogue, and provide alternative coping strategies for substance use.

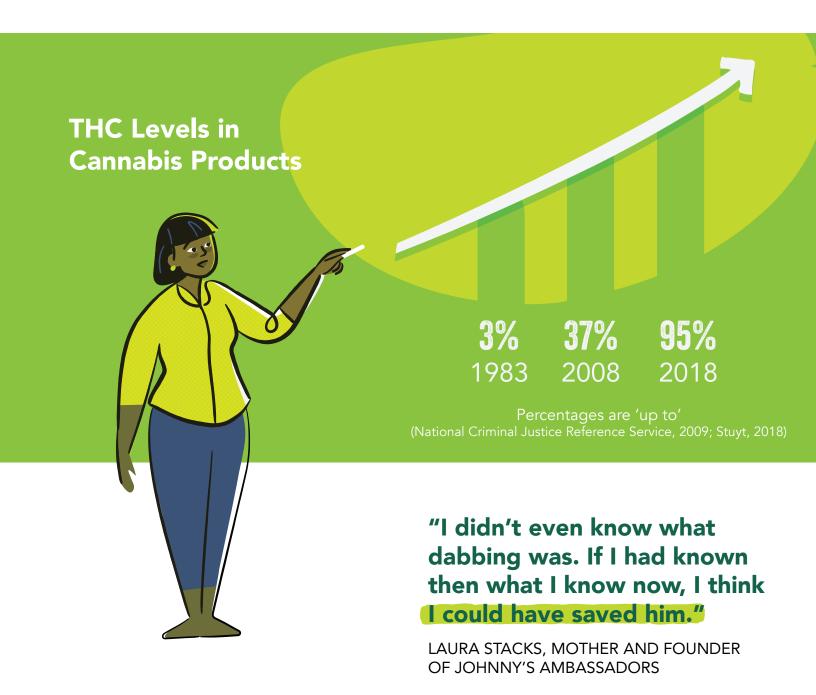


**Public Health Elevated** 

## **Understanding the Problem**

High-potency marijuana use is on the rise. And the THC levels are rising even faster.

Today's marijuana plants contain more THC than the pot of days gone by. Also, new high-concentration products (e.g., oil, shatter, dab, and edibles) deliver much more of the psychoactive ingredient, THC than smokable weed of the past. The speed and intensity of the high they produce are substantially different from what marijuana was capable of doing even a decade ago.

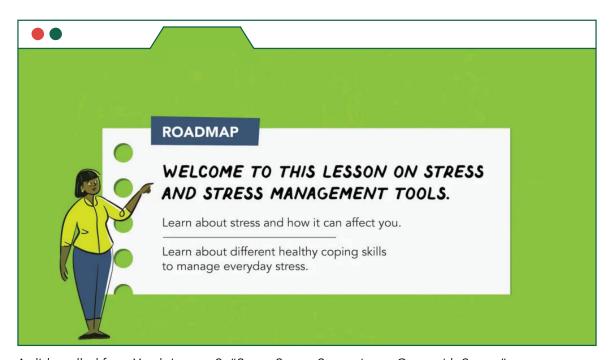


#### A Review of the Scientific Literature

To better understand the landscape, the school initiated the Cannabis Research & Policy Project, which assessed more than 66,000 published studies. In 2023, it released the Scoping Review on Health Effects of High-Concentration Cannabis Products report. While only a few hundred of the studies were deemed high enough quality to produce reliable answers, the study did identify consistent trends throughout the research:

- Most first-time cannabis users are under 21.
- The combination of higher-concentration marijuana and a high-concentration delivery method means users are getting unprecedented amounts of THC at unparalleled speed.
- The concentration of the other primary compound in cannabis – CBD, which is not psychoactive and has therapeutic uses – is decreasing.

- The concentration of THC in marijuana has been increasing steeply for decades.
- Cannabis is being used during pregnancy for stress relief. Use is increasing among younger mothers, those living in urban areas, and those socioeconomically disadvantaged.
- Frequent cannabis users are at increased risk of developing a major psychiatric disorder.



A slide pulled from Youth Lesson 2, "Stress Smart: Strategies to Cope with Stress,"



# A Call to Study, Report, and Act

To inform policy, the Colorado General Assembly enacted HB21-1317 and tasked the school with three initiatives:



#### Review

Review the research on the physical and mental health effects of high concentration cannabis.

2

#### Recommend

Establish a scientific review council to recommend evidence-based regulatory changes and propose funding of additional research to the Colorado General Assembly.



#### **Educate**

Create a public education campaign highlighting the effect of high concentration cannabis with an emphasis on the developing brain and mental health.



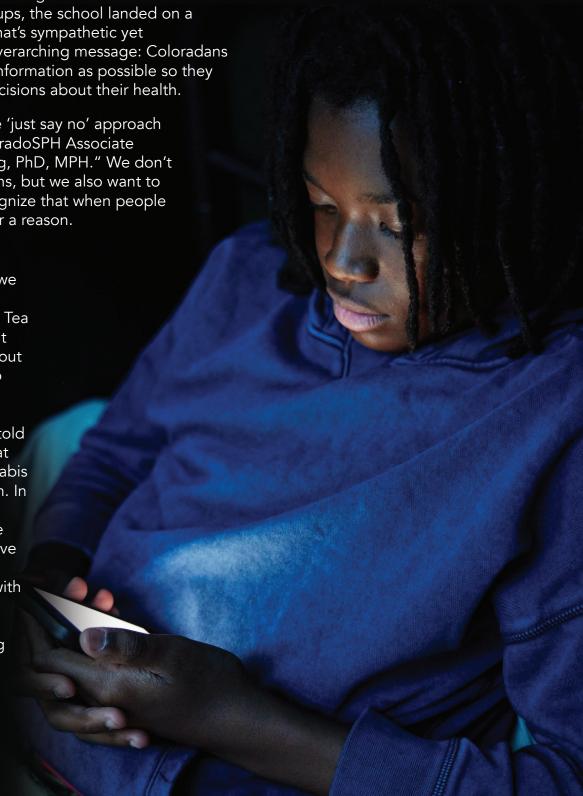
## A Sympathetic Approach That **Focuses on Alternatives**

The most important characteristic of The Tea on THC may be its tone. After testing several visual and verbal themes with focus groups, the school landed on a fact-based approach that's sympathetic yet straightforward. The overarching message: Coloradans should have as much information as possible so they can make informed decisions about their health.

"We just said no to the 'just say no' approach of the past," said ColoradoSPH Associate Professor Gregory Tung, PhD, MPH." We don't soft-pedal difficult truths, but we also want to be respectful and recognize that when people turn to cannabis, it's for a reason.

So, what are those reasons, and how can we help people make informed choices? The Tea on THC isn't only about publishing data; it's about encouraging people to talk to each other."

Community members told the campaign team that many people use cannabis as a coping mechanism. In response, the team examined the literature and identified alternative coping mechanisms including connecting with nature, exercising, and developing social connections are among the best options.



## A Multi-Pronged Strategy

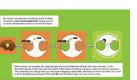
#### Website

The TeaonTHC.org website is designed to educate youth and pregnant people on the risks and effects of high-concentration cannabis. It also educates parents and mentors on how to talk to youth about the risks of today's more potent cannabis products. The site features self-paced learning curricula, podcasts, state and national resource links, video testimonials, and alternative coping strategies for reducing stress.

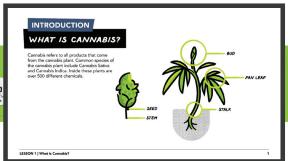


#### **Web-Based Curriculum**

Developed by the Colorado School of Public Health, the easy-to-follow Tea on THC web-based curricula educates learners on the most relevant subjects, including the facts about high-concentration cannabis, stress-management strategies, information on the risks of cannabis during pregnancy, and conversation strategies for parents and concerned adults.











#### **Podcasts Series**

The Tea on THC Podcast explores the topic from multiple angles: you'll hear personal testimonials from people with lived experience and science-backed insights from experts in medicine, psychology, and public health from the Colorado School of Public Health.



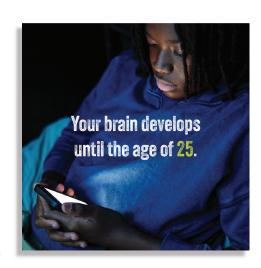


#### **Social Media**

To maximize the campaign's impact, we're building a vibrant online community on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook, the social media platforms our target audiences use most.





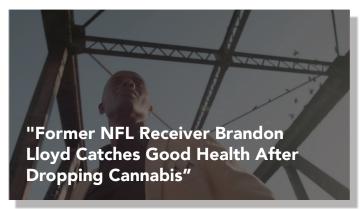


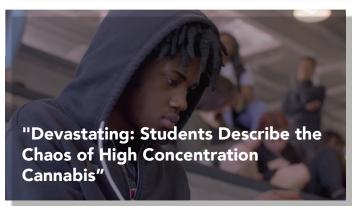
#### **Video Testimonials**

Viewers can also experience heartfelt video stories told by the people who lived it, like the students from Denver's 5280 High School, Laura Stacks, a mom who lost her son to cannabis-induced psychosis; and former Denver Bronco Brandon Lloyd, who broke free from high-concentration cannabis use and found other ways to deal with stress.

"Ever since the first time I smoked cannabis, I was just stuck. That's really all my life started becoming...the next smoke."

SIMON, 16, DENVER, COLORADO 5280 SCHOOL STUDENT





#### **Advertising**

#### Paid Media

Tea on THC is investing in a paid media campaign, including ads on websites, search engines, and social media platforms.



# Is marijuana becoming your best friend? Powered by the Colorado School of Public Health

# Out-of-Home (OOH) Advertising

The campaign will reach a broader audience in public spaces through compelling billboard and transit advertising designed to spark curiosity in our audience.



# How Can People Help Spill the Tea on THC?

Here's how any Coloradan can help:



**Explore** the content at teaonthc.org.



**Share** social messages asking people to think twice.



**Listen** to our video and podcast series.

### Resources

Social Media Kit

**Download Here** 

**Print Media Kit** 

**Download Here** 

**Brand Logos** 

**Download Here** 

**Questions?** 

Mya Cappellino Director of Marketing Initium Health mya@initiumhealth.org 303 928 8511 Ext. 785.











#### Tea on THC Key Stats

The General Assembly directed the Colorado School of Public Health in 2021 to review the scientific literature on the use and effects of high concentration cannabis. Here are some of their key findings.



#### **Trends in THC Concentration**

- THC concentrations nationally averaged around 3% in 1983 and increased to around 13% by 2008, with some products containing as much as 37% concentration (National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 2009).
- By 2018, flower strains contained 17% to 28% THC, and high concentration products had as much as 95% THC (Stuyt, 2018).
- In Colorado, THC concentrations in flower rose from <15% to 20% between 2014 and 2020, and in concentrates, from 40% to 70% (MPG Consulting, 2020).
- As the concentration of THC in cannabis has increased, the CBD has decreased. The ratio of THC to CBD averaged 14:1 in 2001 and reached 80:1 by 2014 (ElSohly et al., 2016).



#### **Cannabis & Pregnancy**

- Cannabis is the most widely used drug during pregnancy and use is increasing (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2017; Ryan et al., 2018).
- Between 2% and 5% of women self-report using cannabis during pregnancy (El Marroun et al., 2011; VanGelder et al., 2010; Passey et al., 2014; Beatty et al., 2012; Schempf et al., 2008).
- Among mothers who are younger, live in urban areas, and are socioeconomically disadvantaged, between 15% and 28% self-report using cannabis during pregnancy (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2017; Passey et al., 2014; Schempf et al., 2009).
- About half of women who use cannabis before becoming pregnant continue using it during their entire pregnancy (Passey et al., 2014; Beatty et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2010).
- From 2002 to 2020, prevalence of cannabis use in pregnancy during the first trimester increased from 6.3% to 16%, in the second trimester from 1.9% to 4.2%, and in the third trimester from 2.0% to 4.7% (Hayes et al., 2023).
- As many as 18% of women who use cannabis during pregnancy meet criteria for cannabis use disorder (Ko et al., 2015).



#### **Cannabis Use Among Youth**

- In 2021, 18.7% of those 12 and older, including 35.4% of those 18-25, used cannabis. It was the most commonly used drug in those age groups (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2022).
- Forty percent of youth aged 12-17 who used cannabis in 2021 did so by vaping, which normally involves high concentration cannabis (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2022).
- About 60% of everybody who used cannabis for the first time in 2021 was under 21 – that's 1.6 million new underage users (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2022).

#### **Mental Health Effects**

- Adolescents who use cannabis have a 1.71X increased risk of developing psychosis compared to nonusers (Kiburi et al., 2021).
- In one study, 27.4% of respondents reported hallucinations during or after using marijuana (Levy et al., 2019).
- Young adults have 1.37X increased odds of developing depression if they used cannabis in adolescence, compared to nonusers (Gobi et al., 2019).
- Daily cannabis users have 3.2X increased odds of developing a psychotic disorder compared with never users (Starzer et al., 2018).
- Daily users of high potency products have 5X increased odds of developing a psychotic disorder compared with never users (Starzer et al., 2018).
- 47.4% of cannabis-induced psychosis events convert to either schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (Di Forti et al., 2019).