

## Q33 Accidental Cannabis Ingestion

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Which *one* of the following statements about accidental cannabis ingestion in young children is *false*?

- 1. Many edible products contain multiple doses of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).
- 2. Patients with severe toxicity experience symptoms for more than 6 hours.
- 3. Hypertension is the main blood pressure abnormality in patients with marijuana toxicity.
- 4. Symptoms of severe toxicity include seizures.

**Educational Point:** Cannabis is one of the most commonly used drugs around the world. In Canada, 72% of individuals reported purchasing marijuana from a legal source in 2024, increasing from 37% in 2019. Young children, especially those younger than 6 years old, are at risk of unintentional or accidental marijuana exposure. Unintentional marijuana ingestion in children younger than 5 years old accounted for 41.6% of all poison control encounters in the United States in 2020. Between 2017 and 2021 in the United States, 36.2% of cases of marijuana ingestion reported in this age group were treated and discharged from the emergency department (ED), 14.6% were admitted to the general care floor, and 8.1% were admitted to the intensive care unit.

Children indiscriminately explore familiar environments and often discover marijuana kept in the home. Unfortunately, many labels and packaging used for cannabis products are made to resemble popular candy or snacks, placing children at risk for consumption. In the 2024 Canadian Cannabis Survey, the most commonly consumed edibles were foods that are highly appetizing for children, such as gummies (91%), chocolate (37%), cookies (18%), and brownies (15%). **Many of these edible products contain multiple doses, with some single edible items containing up to 500 mg of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).** In a retrospective review, the American Academy of Pediatrics reported data that outlined the weight-based impact of marijuana ingestion in children. In cases where the ingestion dose was reported, the weight-based dose was a substantial

predictor of severe toxicity and duration of symptoms in accidental ingestions. **Symptoms typically presented 2 to 4 hours after ingestion, and patients with severe toxicity experienced symptoms for more than 6 hours.** This study recommended any child with a reported history of high-dose ingestion should be monitored for at least 4 to 6 hours until return to baseline, and in a facility where they could be admitted for treatment.

Mild symptoms of marijuana toxicity in children are somnolence, nausea, vomiting, mydriasis, and conjunctival erythema. Patients with abnormal heart rates usually have tachycardia but can have bradycardia. **Hypotension is the main blood pressure abnormality. Symptoms of severe toxicity include respiratory depression, respiratory failure, altered mental status, ataxia, hypotonia, seizure, and unresponsiveness.**

Canada published regulations for the commercial production and packaging of cannabis containing products with the intention of reducing the risk of accidental ingestion; this includes warning labels, plain-text requirements, and child-resistant packaging. This is an important step toward reducing the incidence of unintentional ingestions. Unintentional marijuana ingestion and intoxication are important for primary care providers to recognize, diagnose, and treat across diverse clinical settings as legalization of cannabis products continues.

*The correct answer is 3.*

**Reference:** Zwiebel H, Greenky D, Goldman RD. Accidental cannabis ingestion in young children. *Can Fam Physician*. 2025 Mar;71(3):161-163.

**Link:** <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11934634/>

**PMID:** 40102005