

With High Rates of Marijuana Poisonings, Dogs Getting ‘High’ Is No Laughing Matter



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — July 9, 2018



Credit: Pixabay [1]

Dogs get poisoned, not “just stoned” from marijuana exposure. And, the rates are increasing with the dedicated veterinary services [Pet Poison Helpline](#) [2] experiencing a 448% increase in calls over the past 6 years. This trend is in parallel with legalization efforts by various states. Animals, especially dogs due to their curious nature and ability to access what they sniff, are being poisoned by pot from second-hand smoke, ingestion of edibles or consumption of the actual supply. Whether irresponsibly tossed on the street or positioned in the home, the impact on canines is more dangerous than conventional wisdom asserts.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ([ASPCA](#)) [3] indicates marijuana is toxic to dogs (cats and horses too) with symptoms ranging from “prolonged depression, vomiting, incoordination, sleepiness or excitation, hyper-salivation, dilated pupils, low blood pressure, low body temperature, seizure, coma, and death (rare).” As in humans, in general, when disorientation and neurological signs like wobbliness, tremor or lethargy arise secondary injuries can take place. For example, vomiting while under this altered mental state can lead to dehydration and aspiration into the lungs which can evolve into pneumonia, worsening sepsis and [fatal](#) [4] clinical courses.

In the past, fatalities were extremely uncommon. Fortunately, with early medical intervention dogs can receive supportive care and fare better much of the time. However, due to the increases in tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) concentration - marijuana’s psychoactive ingredient - for medical-grade and recreational products, the consequences are more risky now. It takes less of an exposure to cause a more severe outcome in a dog - in particular with edibles. Additionally, with food mixtures highly varied, use in chocolate brownies or raisins, for instance, pose a double whammy for dogs given that chocolate and raisins are a no-no anyway. Both items are toxic to

dogs and larger amounts can lead to serious medical emergencies, even death.

What it comes down to

Doses make the poison and there is great individual variability in what can overwhelm one animal from the next. [Though cats](#) ^[5], for instance, are also negatively impacted with marijuana, it seems dogs are either more readily getting into it or drawn to it given the number of exposures reported. Often it can take much less of an exposure than you would imagine to create an untoward event, especially given body surface area and biochemical differences (and, don't forget, breed or species). Size, personal metabolic rate, existing medical conditions, current medications and a host of factors can enter the mix when it comes to accidental ingestion and the extent of adverse effects. This is also an issue in humans, albeit with illicit or legal substances, over-the-counter or prescription medications.

Whether it is your dog, small child, or an adult suffering from dementia, preventing the unintentional injury in the first place is in everyone's best interest. This means being cognizant of how items are stored at home, not sharing prescriptions or leaving such items in areas that are within reach.

It is important to understand that an otherwise completely healthy person or dog can also have deleterious responses to unintentional exposures. Marijuana-laced foods don't discriminate in their allure and can get confused with other kitchen contents.

The human factor

With an advancing culture of marijuana legalization and changing attitudes, it is no surprise that with increased production and access unintended consequences will accrue. But, when discussing toxic exposures albeit dog or human, the human factor is often the common denominator.

Being a responsible pet owner, parent or member of the community requires a substantial element of personal responsibility that includes but is not limited to the following: not taking mind-altering chemicals before driving, not smoking pot (or preparing or eating it) with an animal or child present, not sharing prescriptions not intended for you, not self-medicating or leaving potentially hazardous items readily accessible to others, especially those most vulnerable. Accidents certainly happen and that's why they are called accidents. But, controlling what we can control can put a significant dent in curtailing avoidable problems and unnecessary anguish - while reducing health care costs.

Being proactive is traditionally better than being reactive when it comes to toxic poisonings. Consistently child- or animal-proofing dependent on the particular inhabitants of a home can yield great dividends. Seeking immediate and early medical intervention is essential to improving outcomes. Delaying care can be detrimental. If you think your dog ate or inhaled pot, then the stakes are too high for watchful waiting so expeditiously seek emergency veterinary services.

This issue rears its head throughout society. Review [here](#) ^[6] to learn about the increased call burden to poison control centers over ADHD medication misuse and abuse. Or, [here](#) ^[7], regarding opioids and children. And, in general, [here](#) ^[8] when it comes to unintended pharmaceutical error increasingly occurring in the home with the *why* depending on the *who*. Multi-drug [use](#) ^[8] and [polypharmacy](#)

[9] are problematic (as are accidental and intentional abuse of [Tide Pods](#) [10]).

Though the human factor contributes to many of these predicaments, it is that very human factor that has the power to curb the [surge](#) [11] of unintentional injuries currently saddling our healthcare system and leading to preventable suffering.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/07/09/high-rates-marijuana-poisonings-dogs-getting-%E2%80%98high%E2%80%99-no-laughing-matter-13171>

Links

[1] <https://pixabay.com/en/cannabis-hemp-leaf-marijuana-plant-1254745/>

[2] <http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/pet-safety-tips/marijuana-toxicity-pets/>

[3] <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants/marijuana>

[4] <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/ncna889451>

[5] <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/your-dog-drugs-marijuana-poisoning-rise-pets-flna2D11959080>

[6] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/05/21/add-adhd-meds-call-burden-poison-control-centers-12995>

[7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/05/08/hey-media-can-we-get-past-politics-melania-trump%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98be-best%E2%80%99-highlights-much-ignored-opioid-issue-12935>

[8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/07/17/serious-medication-mistakes-happening-home%E2%80%94why-depends-who-11563>

[9] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/08/16/polypharmacy-problems-go-beyond-tiger-woods-11693>

[10] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/01/14/accidental-or-intentional-tide-pods-meant-laundry-not-mouths-12413>

[11] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/11/18/leonard-cohens-death-falling-among-top-5-leading-causes-10458>