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Contact: Paris Ervin

(217) 541-1153

pervin@team-iha.org

Illinois Poison Center: Keep Cannabis Edibles Out of Reach of Children

IPC Issues Important Tips to Reduce Accidental Pediatric Ingestions of Cannabis Edibles Following National Study

CHICAGO – Children ages 5 and younger are accidentally ingesting cannabis edibles at an alarming rate, according to a new study recently published in *Pediatrics*. Researchers for the study entitled, “*Pediatric Edible Cannabis Exposures and Acute Toxicity: 2017–2021*,” analyzed National Poison Data System data for pediatric exposures to edible cannabis products in children ages 5 and younger from 2017-2021. Researchers found of the 7,043 exposures over the period analyzed, the number of cases rose from 207 cases in 2017 to 3,054 cases in 2021, an increase of 1375.0%.

In Illinois, cases reported to the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) in this age group increased from 5 to 232 cases in the same time period – a 4500% increase. The majority of the increase in cases were reported during the pandemic years of 2020-2021.

“We are experiencing an increased amount of poison center calls and hospital visits involving children who unintentionally consumed cannabis edibles,” said IPC Medical Director Michael Wahl, one of the authors of the study. “IPC advises parents to store THC edibles in a safe place that is out of the reach of children and avoid buying edibles that look like candy or a treat that a child would be eager to try. These unintentional ingestions are causing minor to severe reactions in children, including vomiting, seizures, and coma.”

As a result of the new data, IPC is offering the following tips to adults on how to prevent accidental ingestions:

- **Store safely.** If THC edibles are in the home, store them like medications or other potentially hazardous products. Keep them out of reach of kids, or in locked cabinets. They should be in child-resistant packaging or containers. *DO NOT STORE IN KITCHENS.*
- **Store in original or opaque containers without pictures.** Do not transfer into clear containers such as baggies where children can see them and be tempted to ingest the sweet treats.

- **Avoid buying edibles packaged to look like real candy.** Plain, opaque packaging without pictures of candies/sweets is suggested. Be sure to store them in a spot kids cannot reach.
- **Do not consume THC products in front of children,** either for medical or recreational purposes. Children often want to imitate adults and seeing the products could entice kids to ingest them.
- **Talk to family members, friends, and caregivers.** Ask anyone whose home your children spends time (e.g. play dates) in if they use THC edibles. If they do, make sure the edibles are stored safely. Be sure that they don't use them in front of your children.

According to researchers, of the children who were exposed, two-year-old children accounted for the largest share, 27.7%, followed by 3-year-old children, 24.6%, and toddlers under age 1 were 1.9%. Most found the edibles at home—97.1% in a residence and 90.7% in their own home. Of the exposures, 22.7% of patients were admitted to the hospital, but there were no deaths. From 2017 to 2021, there were significant increases in both intensive care unit (ICU) and non-ICU hospital admissions when comparing pre-pandemic and pandemic years.

Researchers concluded that unintentional cannabis exposures in young children are increasing rapidly, and prevention strategies such as packaging, labeling and other controls are needed to decrease these exposures as most edibles—packaged to look like common candies, chocolates, and cookies—are very attractive to young children.

The study was a collaboration with IPC's Michael Wahl, MD, Marit Tweet, MD with SIU Medicine and Antonia Nemanich, MD Rush University Medical Centers.

The study was published online on January 3 and will be included in the February 2023 issue of *Pediatrics*. To access the study, click [here](#). For more information about the Illinois Poison Center, click [here](#).

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The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline (1-800-222-1222) staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.