

# Food for Thought: 3 things to know about cannabis edibles



March 2019

“Edibles” refer to food or drinks to which cannabis has been added as an ingredient. Edibles will be permitted for sale under the Cannabis Act no later than October 17, 2019 (along with cannabis extracts and topicals). Currently, people can still make their own edibles from cannabis purchased legally. They can also obtain cannabis to make edibles or purchase ready-made edibles from the illicit market, such as online or from dispensaries.

While smoking cannabis is still the most common form of consumption, 42% of Canadians who have consumed non-medical cannabis in the past 12 months have eaten it in food.<sup>1</sup> Local data from our Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) cannabis survey revealed that 52% of residents who have consumed non-medical cannabis in the past 12 months have eaten it in food. In American states that have legalized cannabis, edibles have become increasingly popular.<sup>2</sup>

**With the legal sale of cannabis edibles around the corner here are 3 important things to know:**

## **1. Edibles affect you differently than if you smoke or vape cannabis**

Edible products are responsible for a significant number of healthcare visits due to cannabis intoxication in other jurisdictions that have legalized edibles.<sup>3</sup> When eating or drinking products made with cannabis it can take up to two hours to feel the effects (compared to minutes for smoking/vaping). Because of this delay there is the risk of over consumption which can result in negative experiences, including psychosis, paranoia, anxiety, and other negative health effects. Local data from our WDGPH cannabis survey revealed that most residents (55%) in Wellington County, Dufferin County or the City of Guelph were unaware of this delayed effect.

Edibles are also less consistent in terms of potency and effect which can also increase the risk for over-consuming.<sup>2</sup> The effects of edibles also last much longer compared to smoking or vaping. This is important to know especially if someone is planning on driving.

## **2. Edibles pose an elevated risk for accidental ingestion**

Following cannabis legalization in Colorado there was an increase in poison control calls and hospital admissions of children due to accidental consumption of cannabis, the majority related to edibles.<sup>4</sup>

Cannabis edibles include brownies, chocolate bars, lollipops, cookies, gummy bears and more. These types of products obviously appeal to young children. Because of this it is imperative that edibles (as well as all forms of cannabis) are kept in a secure and locked location out of reach and visibility from children, teens, and pets.

## **3. Edibles are safer for your lungs and eliminate second-hand-smoke exposure**

Cannabis smoke contains many of the same toxic chemicals as cigarette smoke.<sup>5</sup> Canada’s Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines state that smoking cannabis is the most harmful way to use and list vaping and edibles as safer alternatives for the lungs while noting that no option is risk-free.<sup>6</sup>

## Actions that WDGPH is taking

WDGPH, along with other health units, participated in Health Canada's consultation on the proposed regulations for cannabis edibles, extracts and topicals. We advocated for strict limits on THC levels, strict labelling requirements including health warnings, stricter regulations to prohibit products and packaging that appeal to youth and supported proposed requirements for child-resistant packaging.

WDGPH's "Talking About Weed" campaign and website includes information about the health effects of cannabis and ways to reduce harm whether smoking, vaping, eating or drinking cannabis. Our website includes a video and specific information about the unique risks associated with edibles. A renewed information campaign about edibles is scheduled for later this year.

## References

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