

States Without Legal Cannabis See Spike in Delta-8 Poison Calls

Delta-8 THC Products Linked to Increase in Calls to Poison Control Centers, Study Shows

A recent study published in the **Journal of Medical Toxicology** suggests that products containing **Delta-8 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)** may be contributing to a rise in calls to poison control centers, particularly in states where cannabis remains illegal. The study titled “Delta-8 Tetrahydrocannabinol Exposures Reported to US Poison Centers: Variations Among US States and Regions and Associations with Public Policy” examines how **Delta-8 THC**, a psychoactive compound derived from hemp, is affecting public health in the absence of uniform regulation.

Unregulated Cannabis Market and Delta-8 THC Exposures

The cannabis industry is largely unregulated, with no universal standards governing the purity or potency of products like **Delta-8 THC**. This lack of regulation has led to significant variations in the quality of Delta-8 products, raising concerns among health officials. Researchers from **Ohio State University’s College of Medicine** analyzed data from the **National Poison Data System (NPDS)** from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022, focusing on incidents where Delta-8 THC was identified as the primary substance. During this period, the study identified **4,925 exposures** linked to Delta-8 THC, with **69.8%** of these exposures occurring in the southern United States.

Key Findings from the Study

The study’s researchers examined multiple variables including year, age group, route of exposure (ingestion or inhalation), and medical outcomes. The findings showed that the rate of Delta-8 THC exposures per **100,000 people** increased by **79.2%**, from **0.53 in 2021 to 0.95 in 2022**. States where cannabis use remained illegal experienced a significantly higher rate of Delta-8 THC exposures compared to states with legalized cannabis markets.

For instance, in states where cannabis was illegal, the **mean exposure rate** for Delta-8 THC was **1.64 per 100,000 people**, compared to **0.52 per 100,000** in states where cannabis was legal. The study also highlighted the impact of regulation on Delta-8 THC exposure rates, with states where Delta-8 THC was **unregulated** showing higher exposure rates (1.36 per 100,000) than those where the compound was **banned** (0.17 per 100,000).

Severity of Delta-8 THC Exposures

Medical outcomes were categorized into different levels of severity, ranging from minor effects to life-threatening conditions. The study categorized the outcomes into eight levels:

1. **No effect**
2. **Minor effect** (symptoms that resolve quickly)
3. **Moderate effect** (pronounced or prolonged symptoms)
4. **Major effect** (life-threatening or causing significant disability)
5. **Death**
6. **Not followed** (minimal effects)
7. **Unrelated effect**
8. **Unable to follow** (potential toxic exposure)

Most Delta-8 THC exposures resulted in **minor or moderate effects**, but a concerning number led to more severe outcomes, particularly in states where cannabis remains illegal.

Regional Trends: Southern States See Higher Exposure Rates

A notable trend from the study was the concentration of Delta-8 THC exposures in the southern United States, where cannabis legalization is limited. This region accounted for the majority of poison control center reports related to Delta-8 THC. The lack of regulated cannabis markets in these states may be driving consumers toward unregulated products, which can vary greatly in quality and safety.

According to the study's authors, states with legal cannabis markets experienced fewer calls to poison control centers for Delta-8 THC exposures. This suggests that **legalization and regulation** may help mitigate the risks associated with unregulated products. The researchers concluded that consistent regulation of Delta-8 THC across all states should be considered to prevent further harm.

Calls for Federal Regulation

Currently, hemp-derived products like Delta-8 THC are largely unregulated at the federal level. The **2018 Farm Bill** granted the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** authority to regulate hemp-derived products, including Delta-8 THC, but the agency has not yet established a comprehensive regulatory framework. The FDA has indicated that **Congress** needs to take the lead in creating legislation to regulate the commercial production and marketing of hemp-derived cannabinoids.

The lack of federal oversight has led to a patchwork of state-level regulations, with some states banning Delta-8 THC while others have left it unregulated. The result is a market where consumers have little assurance of product safety, and poison control centers are seeing a rise in calls related to Delta-8 THC exposures.

Conclusions from the Study

The study's findings are clear: **Delta-8 THC exposures** reported to poison control centers in the U.S. rose sharply from 2021 to 2022, with a **79% increase** in calls. The southern region of the U.S., where cannabis remains largely illegal, saw the majority of these cases. States with legalized cannabis experienced fewer Delta-8 THC-related exposures, highlighting the potential benefits of regulation.

The study's authors strongly recommend **consistent regulation** of Delta-8 THC across the U.S. to ensure consumer safety and prevent further harm. As the demand for cannabis products continues to grow, particularly in states where marijuana remains illegal, the need for federal oversight becomes increasingly urgent.

The Road Ahead: Ensuring Consumer Safety

The rapid increase in Delta-8 THC exposures underscores the need for clearer guidelines and regulations to protect consumers. While Delta-8 THC products offer an alternative to traditional cannabis, the current lack of regulation has led to significant public health concerns. Poison control centers are on the front lines of these issues, and their reports highlight the risks posed by unregulated cannabis products.

Moving forward, lawmakers, regulators, and industry stakeholders must work together to create a safer, more transparent market for cannabis products, including Delta-8 THC. Consistent federal regulations would not only protect consumers but also ensure that the industry can grow in a responsible and sustainable manner.

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