

# Ohio Sees Rise in Accidental Cannabis Exposures in Kids Under 12

## Accidental Cannabis Exposures in Young Children Skyrocket in Ohio in 2024

**COLUMBUS, Ohio** — The number of accidental marijuana exposures among young children in Ohio has surged dramatically, according to recent data from the Central Ohio Poison Center. In 2024, the number of accidental marijuana exposures in children aged five and under is more than five times what it was just five years ago.

Natalie Rine, director of the Central Ohio Poison Center, attributes this alarming increase to the rise of legal marijuana products, especially edibles that resemble familiar treats. “Even since 2019 when medical marijuana was legalized, we started to see an uptick in these exposures,” Rine explained.

### Fivefold Increase in Accidental Exposures

As of October 10, 2024, nearly 600 cases of accidental marijuana exposure involving children aged 12 and under have been reported in Ohio, with 75% of those incidents involving children under the age of five. This sharp rise comes as no surprise to experts like Rine, who had anticipated more cases with the recent legalization of recreational marijuana in Ohio.

“So far in 2024, accidental marijuana exposures in children five years old and under are more than five times what they were five years ago,” Rine said, highlighting the need for increased caution and prevention.

### Edibles Pose the Greatest Risk

Rine points out that edible marijuana products, like gummies, are the primary culprit in these accidental exposures. These products are particularly dangerous for young children because they often look like regular candy, making it easy for kids to mistake them for harmless treats.

Despite regulations set by Ohio’s Division of Cannabis Control, which prohibit packaging that could be attractive to children, such as images of cartoon characters or commercial candy look-alikes, accidental ingestion continues to rise. The rules also require that edibles themselves do not resemble cartoon characters or popular candies, but the similarity in appearance to other snacks still poses a challenge.

### Recognizing the Symptoms

Rine advises parents to be vigilant if they suspect their child has ingested marijuana. “More often than not, you’re gonna see fast heart rates, they could be nauseated, vomiting, but they might be very, very drowsy, sleepy—much more than you would expect and harder to wake,” she explained.

One complicating factor is that symptoms of marijuana ingestion in children can take several hours to appear, which can make it difficult for caregivers to identify the cause of the symptoms. In some cases, the effects of marijuana on young children can lead to more serious medical issues, though Rine emphasized that in older children and adults, the products are typically not as harmful.

### **Preventing Accidental Exposure**

Rine stresses that preventing these accidental exposures is possible. She urges parents and caregivers to store marijuana products in secure locations that are out of reach of children. “This is definitely a preventable issue, and trying to take some of those measures would be very helpful,” she said.

As the legalization of both medical and recreational marijuana continues to expand, Rine underscores the importance of public awareness and careful storage of these products to reduce the risk of accidental exposure to children.

### **What to Do in Case of Exposure**

If parents suspect their child has accidentally ingested marijuana, Rine advises them to contact the 24/7 poison emergency hotline immediately. Nurses and pharmacists are available to provide guidance and recommend the appropriate next steps. The hotline number is 1-800-222-1222.

By remaining vigilant and keeping marijuana products securely stored, Rine believes parents can significantly reduce the number of these preventable exposures, ensuring children’s safety amidst the growing presence of legal cannabis products in Ohio.

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