

# Virginia Hospitals See More ED Visits From Chronic Cannabis Users

## Virginia Emergency Department Visits Rise Sharply for Long-Term Cannabis Use as Hospitalizations for Abuse, Dependence, and Poisoning Reach Five-Year Highs

(WSET) — A recent study conducted by the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association (VHHA) highlights a significant uptick in hospital visits related to cannabis use, including abuse, dependence, and poisoning, among adults in the state. The findings underscore growing concerns about the health impacts of long-term cannabis consumption and the increasing visibility of certain cannabis-related medical conditions.

From 2020 to 2024, Virginia emergency departments recorded 172,778 adult patient visits tied to cannabis-related diagnoses, with annual totals consistently surpassing 31,000 visits. The highest number was reported in 2022, when 37,690 patients sought emergency care for cannabis-related issues.

## Rising Cases of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome Highlight Health Risks Among Long-Term Cannabis Users in Virginia

Among the most notable trends identified in the VHHA report is the increase in Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS), a condition characterized by recurrent severe nausea, abdominal pain, and vomiting in chronic cannabis users. Between 2020 and 2024, CHS-related emergency visits rose nearly 29%, totaling 24,960 cases over the five-year period. Annual visits climbed from 4,027 in 2020 to 5,175 in 2024, demonstrating a steady upward trajectory.

Julian Walker, VHHA's vice president of communications, emphasized the seriousness of these cases, noting that symptoms often do not subside without medical intervention. "Those symptoms are not going away, they are not subsiding, and efforts to relieve those symptoms are not successful; that might be a situation in which a patient would want to contact a physician or potentially seek emergency care," Walker said.

## THC-Infused Edibles and Cannabis Products Increasingly Available, Though Direct Links to Hospitalizations Remain Unclear

While the report does not establish a definitive causal relationship, VHHA officials pointed to the growing availability of THC containing products, such as candies and baked goods, as a potential factor influencing trends in cannabis related emergency visits. Walker cautioned that these patterns exist on parallel tracks and that it would be premature to conclude a direct connection at this stage.

“THC-type products have become more readily available,” Walker said. “But those are two fact patterns that exist on parallel tracks. At this point, it would be premature to definitively say one is related to the other.”

## **Public Health Implications and the Importance of Awareness Among Patients and Providers**

The findings of the VHHA study highlight the public health implications of long-term cannabis use, particularly for middle-aged and older adults who may use the substance regularly for recreational or therapeutic purposes. Health officials recommend that individuals experiencing persistent nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain related to cannabis consumption seek prompt medical evaluation to prevent complications.

The increasing prevalence of CHS and other cannabis-related emergencies underscores the need for physician awareness, patient education, and ongoing research to understand the risks associated with chronic cannabis use. Emergency department visits represent just the tip of the iceberg, according to experts, as some individuals may not seek care despite experiencing significant symptoms.

## **Virginia Sees Continued Monitoring as Cannabis Use Evolves and New Products Enter the Market**

As cannabis legalization expands and new THC-infused products become more accessible, Virginia hospitals and public health officials continue to monitor trends in cannabis-related hospital visits. The VHHA study provides critical insights into the scale of the issue, offering a foundation for policy planning, clinical guidance, and preventive strategies to manage cannabis-related health risks.

While the relationship between product availability and hospitalizations remains complex, the rise in emergency visits serves as a clear signal for both healthcare providers and consumers to exercise caution, particularly for those engaging in long-term or frequent cannabis use.

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