



December 5th, 2023

Chairman Michael Rulli
General Government Committee
Ohio Senate
Ohio Poison Center Capacity in Response to Recreational Marijuana

Chairman Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing us to testify on the impact of recreational marijuana on Ohio's citizens and the projected impact on our poison control operations. My name is Jon Colvin and I serve as the Managing Director of the Drug and Poison Information Center located at Cincinnati Children's. I am joined by my colleague Dr. Hannah Hays, the Medical Director and Chief of Toxicology at the Central Ohio Poison Center located at Nationwide Children's in Columbus. Together, we represent Poison Control services provided to all Ohioans at no cost 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

Ohio Poison Control Centers (PCCs) provide immediate, trusted expert medical advice and drug information to individuals and families of all ages. Last year, we responded to more than 80,000 poisoning victims and 25,000 inquiries, representing a poisoning or drug overdose every 6 minutes. One in five of these calls were received from emergency departments, first responders, and law enforcement professionals responding to an overdose patient or poisoning victim.

All Poison Control services are provided by highly trained physicians, pharmacists, nurses, and allied health professionals with specialized training and certification in medical toxicology and related disciplines including addiction medicine. It is well established that consultation with a poison center improves patient outcomes and eliminates unnecessary healthcare costs by reducing unnecessary ED visits, ambulance runs, and hospital length of stay. It is estimated that we save Ohioans nearly \$60 million dollars each year, second only to vaccines in savings per dollar invested.

Every call to the poison center is documented and uploaded to the National Poison Data System (NPDS) in real time. Our data is used to identify and respond to emerging public health threats across the state, as well as to advance medical research. We can also adapt these data systems to support proactive risk evaluation and prevention strategies. For example, our data is used to monitor novel opioids, e-cigarettes, edible marijuana products, toxic mushroom exposures, and increased adolescent overdose and self-harm trends. Ohio Poison Centers play a key role in emergency preparedness and response, as demonstrated by the clinical guidance and situational awareness we provided during the East Palestine Train Derailment incident.

In addition to the poison control hotline, we act as the hub for medical toxicology training and maintain a team of educators and prevention specialists who are focused on reducing the impact of poisoning and drug overdose within Ohio communities. Our services are accredited by the American Association of Poison Control Centers and certified by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

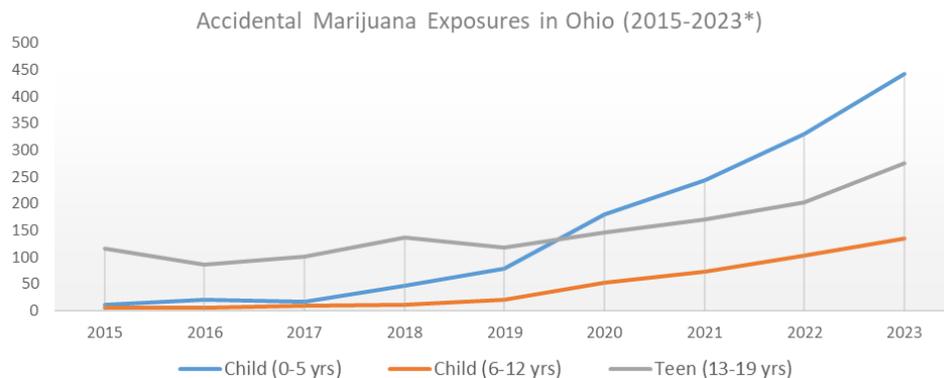
As our colleagues in surrounding states have learned, marijuana presents several challenging public health issues, which my colleague, Dr. Hannah Hays, will explain further.

The number of accidental poisonings reported to Ohio Poison Centers increased 20-fold since medical marijuana sales began in early 2019. When children access these products, they can experience severe

symptoms including hallucinations, confusion, loss of consciousness, and respiratory failure. Children ages 1-6 years of age are most frequently involved in accidental exposures. We currently receive several calls each and every day for cannabis exposures in children under six. A quarter of children who consume these products require admission to the hospital, and more than a third of those admitted require ICU level care. In fact, I spent my afternoon yesterday caring for a critically ill child who accidentally consumed cannabis edibles after mistaking them for candy. This child required admission to the pediatric intensive care unit for life saving medications and care after he developed difficulty walking, severe encephalopathy, and low blood pressure. This is an almost-every-day event.

Because symptoms do not begin immediately after a cannabis edible ingestion, children have time to consume very large doses before they recognize that something is wrong. When this happens, we often receive a call from EMS, requesting assistance in caring for a critically ill child while on scene and in transport. This is an almost-every-day event.

It may not surprise you that poison centers receive calls from law enforcement who are in a situation where they are caring for a person, a child or an adult, with severe symptoms after an exposure to cannabis edibles. In my practice, I also receive phone calls almost weekly from child protective services and police officers who need my help understanding what happened, how to interpret laboratory testing, and how to support families with education and other prevention resources.



These accidental poisonings are negatively affecting children, families, and healthcare systems throughout the state of Ohio and they will undoubtedly continue to increase. With the passage of recreational marijuana, Ohio PCCs project an increased volume of calls, consultations with healthcare providers, and the need for additional public education programs to combat these exposures.

Research from other states with recreational marijuana demonstrates an increase in accidental ingestions by children and adults and we anticipate a similar trend in Ohio. Multiple states have reported unintentional poisoning incidents involving children more than doubled after legalization.¹²³

¹ Thomas, A.A., Von Derau, K., Bradford, M.C., Moser, E., Garrard, A. & Mazor, S. (2019). Unintentional pediatric marijuana exposures prior to and after legalization and commercial availability of recreational marijuana in Washington State. *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 56(4), 398-404

² Wang, G.S., Hoyte, C., Roosevelt, G. & Heard, K. (2019). The continued impact of marijuana legalization on unintentional pediatric exposures in Colorado. *Clinical Pediatrics* 58(1), 114-116.

³ Wang, S.G., Roosevelt, G., & Heard, K. (2013). Pediatric marijuana exposures in a medical marijuana state. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 167(7), 630-633.

- An August 2022 article published in the Journal of the American College of Emergency Physicians noted in a poison center database review of 985 inadvertent pediatric marijuana exposures, call rates in decriminalized states increased by **30% per year – every year- over** a six-year period, compared to no change in non-legal states.⁴
- A study conducted by Nationwide Children’s Hospital clearly indicates a correlation between the legalization of marijuana and accidental ingestion. The study found that over an eight-year period, the mean annual rate of marijuana ingestions in children rose by **27% per year** - with more than 70% of all cases occurring in states with legalized marijuana.⁵

To prevent accidental poisoning and reduce the impact on Ohioans, we are recommending that the General Assembly include measures targeted to prevent exposure and increase safety with these products, which include, but are not limited to:

- Prominent placement of the poison help line (1-800-222-1222) in dispensaries and on product packaging
- Child-resistant / tamper-resistant packaging of products
- Clear labeling of cannabis (marijuana) content on packaging
- Individual wrapping of each dosing unit
- Limitations of total cannabis (marijuana) content per package
- Restriction of the use of brightly colored products and logos that may be appealing to children

As stated previously, Ohio’s Poison Centers save \$60 million dollars in unnecessary healthcare spending each year, yet Ohio is the **only** remaining state that does not currently provide financial support for this free public service. The vast majority of subsidized funding falls on Ohio’s pediatric medical centers.

On behalf of Ohio PCCs, we recommend that the General Assembly dedicate a small percentage of the tax revenue from recreational marijuana excise tax to support our services. We recommend creating sustainable state support for the purpose of creating visibility into the use of these funds and the importance of these services in protecting the public and tracking injuries and exposures resulting from the new recreational marijuana industry. This stable, permanent funding will allow Ohio PCCs to provide:

- Prevention Services – PCC expertise will be integrated to develop effective risk mitigation strategies with increased availability of marijuana in households.
- Public Education – expand educational initiatives to improve public awareness of the risks tied to highly concentrated marijuana formulations.
- Consultation to Providers – continue to support front line health workers and first responders to develop best practice guidelines to prevent future exposures.
- Data Collection – real time data can be used to better inform and evaluate regulatory and public health measures to enhance safety surveillance, sentinel event detection, research, and risk mitigation strategies.

⁴ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9255894/

⁵ www.nationwidechildrens.org/newsroom/news-releases/2019/06/marijuana-ingestions-study

With the passage of recreational marijuana, Ohio's children will have increased access to harmful products. Ohio PCCs are ready to assist Ohio children, families, and communities in responding to accidental exposures, supporting prevention programs to educate the public, and collecting data to improve public health policies.

While we can anticipate some ways this new industry will impact the state of Ohio, we have yet to understand its full impact. Ohio's Poison Control Centers will clearly play a vital role in effectively tackling these challenges. We are a unique combination of clinical care, cost effectiveness, public health surveillance, and interaction with those on front lines from first responders to law enforcement, and everyone in between. We are a proven, highly efficient network most deserving of full support and funding.

Chair Rulli and members of the committee, thank you for allowing us to testify today on the critical role Ohio Poison Centers play in keeping our children and families safe. We would gladly answer any questions.

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