Cannabis-Induced Psychosis in Adolescents

CANNABIS USE IN CANADA

Of Canadians aged 15 and older have used cannabis. The most frequent users of cannabis are between 16-24 years old, and their use is double that of those 25+ years old.

15-24 yrs comprised 49% to 58% of cannabis-related hospitalizations in Canada between 2006 to 2015.

WHAT IS PSYCHOSIS?

Psychosis is a mental condition where one may find it difficult to determine what is and is not real. A person experiencing psychosis may have negative symptoms like diminished emotional expression. They may also have positive symptoms like hallucinations and delusions, which can be induced by engaging in cannabis use.

WHAT IS THC?

THC comes from the plant, cannabis sativa. One property of cannabis, known as THC, is responsible for creating a 'high' feeling. However, THC may also create psychosis symptoms in certain individuals.

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HOW ARE CANNABIS AND PSYCHOSIS RELATED?

1. ALTERATIONS IN THE BRAIN

Chronic cannabis use is associated with decreased grey matter in the brain. Decreased grey matter is also associated with people who have psychosis experiences.

2. GENETICS & ENVIRONMENT

Cannabis use can influence psychosis by a host of genetic and environmental risk factors. Combined with these factors, cannabis use can lead to psychosis symptom experiences in adulthood.

3. SELF-MEDICATION HYPOTHESIS

People who chronically use cannabis may become more sensitive to the calming properties of cannabis but also more reactive to its psychosis-inducing effects over time.

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WHO IS AT RISK?

Cannabis-induced psychosis is dose-dependent. The more cannabis a person uses, the greater the risk for experiencing psychosis.

People with a history of childhood trauma who use cannabis during adolescence are at increased risk for psychosis.

People with high schizotypy (ex. dissociative or imaginative states) who engage in cannabis use are at increased risk for psychosis.

PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Abstain from or reduce frequency of cannabis use, especially during adolescence.

Use cannabis products with low to THC or opt for products with CBD (cannabidiol) products instead.

Please consult with your physician for potential medication options.

Therapeutic intervention for vulnerable adolescents who have experienced childhood trauma can reduce risk of cannabis-induced psychosis.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy can challenge and reduce fears about and experiences of delusions and hallucinations for people at high risk for psychosis.

Psycho-education about psychosis symptoms and the effects of cannabis can reduce cannabis use and encourage people to seek treatment.