



Secondhand Cannabis Smoke (SHCS)

AKA: "Contact High"



FACTS AND HEALTH RISKS

Secondhand cannabis smoke (SHCS) is the involuntary/passive inhalation of smoke exhaled by another person or from the burning end of a joint, pipe, blunt or bong.

Those exposed to SHCS may experience lung irritation, respiratory infections, and worsening existing medical conditions (i.e., asthma, bronchitis, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease).¹

SHCS can be particularly harmful for certain vulnerable populations.

- Fetal development may be affected for those who are pregnant
- Children and youth under 25 may experience impairments to critical brain development²

- 33-57% of THC* is released into the environment from cannabis smoke.⁵
- SHCS contains many of the same carcinogens (i.e. tar, benzene, and heavy metals) as secondhand tobacco smoke.¹
- Cannabis smoke has higher concentrations of harmful chemicals compared to tobacco smoke, posing a significant risk to our health.²
- 1 minute of SHCS exposure can result in 30 minutes of impairment. This may not have significant bodily effects but should be considered in drug testing and exposure to vulnerable populations, like children.⁴
- SHCS can cause slight impairment in memory and motor and cognitive functioning.⁴

*THC is the chemical in cannabis that changes the way we think, feel, and act



POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

People who inhale secondhand cannabis smoke may experience the following side effects:³

- **Headaches**
- **Eye irritation**
- **Chest tightness**
- **Coughing**
- **Nausea**
- **Anxiety**
- **"Contact High"**

There are several factors that influence the risk of a contact high:⁵

- Amount of THC within the cannabis product. Higher potencies result in greater effects to the mind and body
- Distance to the active smoker
- Duration of the secondhand smoke exposure
- Level of ventilation within the space. Greater ventilation will reduce the amount of SHCS in the environment

HARM REDUCTION

There are actions that can be taken to reduce the health risks associated with secondhand cannabis smoke to help protect yourself and those around you.

Active Smokers

- Follow smoking laws and regulations in public spaces
- Avoid smoking around vulnerable populations
- Consider alternative cannabis products that are not inhaled
- If smoking indoors, ensure proper ventilation

Non-Users

- Increase the distance from active smokers to avoid unwanted exposure
- Avoid or limit the time spent around active smokers
- Avoid or limit exposure to SHCS if pregnant, a youth under 25, or have asthma

1. American Nonsmoker's Rights Foundation (n.d) Secondhand Marijuana Smoke Fact Sheet. <https://no-smoke.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/secondhand-marijuana-smoke.pdf>

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). Secondhand Marijuana. <https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/health-effects/second-hand-smoke.html>

3. Medical News Today (2020). What are the side effects of secondhand marijuana smoke?. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/side-effects-of-secondhand-marijuana-smoke>

4. National Institute on Drug Abuse (2021). What are the effects of secondhand exposure to marijuana smoke?. <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/what-are-effects-secondhand-exposure-to-marijuana-smoke>

5. Cone, E. J., Bigelow, G. E., Herrmann, E. S., Mitchell, J. M., LoDico, C., Flegel, R., & Vandrey, R. (2015). Nonsmoker Exposure to Secondhand Cannabis Smoke. III. Oral Fluid and Blood Drug Concentrations and Corresponding Subjective Effects. *Journal of analytical toxicology*, 39(7), 497-509. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jat/bkv070>