



CLAIM	RESPONSE
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Cannabis use “can cause potentially lethal damage to the heart and arteries.”

- *World Federation Against Drugs (World Federation Against Drugs, 2015)*

- Claims asserting that cannabis use causes “lethal damage” to the heart are overstating the existing scientific research. Given major gaps in the evidence, research is needed to understand the potential cardiovascular harms of cannabis use.
- The impact of cannabis use on heart health is currently not well understood (Volkow et al., 2014). Cannabis use has been found to be associated with acute effects that can trigger events like heart attack or stroke (Jouanjus, Lapeyre-Mestre, & Micallef, 2014; Thomas, Kloner, & Rezkalla, 2014), particularly among older adults (W. Hall, 2014). However, clear causal linkages have not been established.
- With respect to the broader impact of cannabis use on physical health, studies have found that low, occasional cannabis use does not adversely affect the lungs (Pletcher et al., 2012). However, the impact of long-term cannabis smoking on respiratory function is less clear (W. Hall, 2014). Some studies have reported that smoking cannabis is associated with various respiratory-related problems (Gordon, Conley, & Gordon, 2013; Tashkin, 2013; Tashkin, Baldwin, Sarafian, Dubinett, & Roth, 2002), whereas others have found no strong association with several lung conditions (Tashkin, 2013). The impact of cannabis smoking on lung cancer, in particular, remains unclear (Hashibe et al., 2006).
- It is worth noting that the risks of illness and death associated with the use of tobacco and alcohol are much higher than those associated with cannabis. For example, evidence has found far greater risk of lung problems among tobacco users compared to regular cannabis users (Tashkin, 2013). Hence, the legal status of a drug should not be interpreted as meaning that it poses lower health risks than illegal drugs. This is useful to remember given that calls to sustain the prohibition of illegal drugs, like cannabis, are often accompanied with assertions about their health harms.
- Harm reduction strategies that substitute smoking cannabis with other routes of administration can be effective at decreasing the negative health consequences of cannabis use, particularly on the lungs. Compared to what is possible under prohibition, a regulated market in which cannabis is purchased from licensed dispensers can allow for a greater range of harm reduction strategies such as “vaping” or edible consumption.

BOTTOM LINE: There is little evidence to suggest that cannabis use can cause lethal damage to the heart, nor is there clear evidence of an association between cannabis use and cancer.

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