

THC Potency Concerns: Are Stronger Products More Problematic?

For the past several decades, every generation of legalization opponents **have claimed** that the marijuana of their era is exponentially **more potent** and, therefore, more dangerous to health than the marijuana of yesteryear. These **largely sensationalist claims** have perpetuated the plant's continued criminalization, as well as the stigmatization and criminalization of those who possess and consume it.

Indeed, the average potency of cannabis **has risen** over past decades, but not nearly to the extent claimed by these opponents. Fundamentally, cannabis remains largely the same plant it has always been – with most of the increase in strength akin to the difference between beer and wine, or between a cup of tea and an espresso.

The availability of more potent cannabis products is not a new phenomenon. In fact, higher potency products, like hashish, have always been available to consumers. Typically, when consumers encounter higher potency products, **they consume lesser quantities of them**. This self-regulatory process is known as **self-titration**.

Moreover, contrary to popular opinion, higher potency THC products do not dominate the state-legal market. In fact, most consumers **tend to prefer** and to **gravitate toward flower** products of more moderate potencies, not concentrates.

Reports of subjective adverse effects due to the consumption of highly potent products are relatively atypical. Consumers **do not report** concentrates to be more reinforcing/dependence-inducing than other, more traditional formulations of cannabis. The consumption of higher-potency concentrates **is not associated** with exacerbated adverse effects on cognitive performance as compared to the use of lower-potency flower products.

Studies have generally **failed to identify** an independent causal link between the increased use of cannabis within the general population and any parallel rise in psychiatric disorders, like **psychosis or schizophrenia**; Claims in *The Lancet* and elsewhere purporting such a link **are specious** because they are based on self-reports of users consuming cannabis products of unknown potency obtained on the illicit market.

Perhaps most importantly, THC, regardless of either quantity or potency, **cannot cause lethal overdose** in humans. Since 1985 the US FDA has regulated the prescription drug **dronabinol**, which consists only of synthetic THC. In 1999, the agency **reduced** the restrictions on dronabinol based upon findings that it posed little risk to health and safety.

Banning the retail sale of cannabis products above a certain percentage of THC will not eliminate market demand for these products; it will only move the production and distribution of these products exclusively to the unregulated market. This policy change does not promote public health or safety.