

Cannabis Cafés and Health Risks: What should cities know before allowing them?

CANNABIS CAFÉS

CA Assembly Bill 1775 took effect on January 1, 2025, and allows cities and counties to permit licensed cannabis lounges to sell food and non-alcoholic drinks and host live entertainment. AB 1775 removes the previous state-imposed restriction on preparing and selling any non-cannabis foods or drinks on site in licensed cannabis dispensaries where cannabis consumption is allowed. It allows local jurisdictions to carve out an exception to the statewide smoke free law.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

This exposes employees, performers, vendors and visitors to health risks including:

- Mental health risks
- Cardiovascular and respiratory risks
- Unintentional poisoning
- Impaired brain functioning



INCREASED RISK OF SECONDHAND SMOKE

- Secondhand smoke exposure is a risk to both consumer and workers in cannabis cafés. Cannabis smoke contains many of the same harmful chemicals and fine particles as tobacco smoke. Even with ventilation systems, there is no safe level of exposure to indoor secondhand smoke, which can lead to respiratory problems for both customers and staff. Additionally, thirdhand smoke—residue that lingers on surfaces—can also pose health risks.
- Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive compound in cannabis, can be absorbed into the bloodstream of nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Adequate ventilation systems must be in place to mitigate the potential health effects of secondhand cannabis smoke and ensure a safer environment for employees and patrons. This includes safeguards such as:
 - Expressly protecting employees' discretion to wear a mask for respiration, paid for at the expense of the employer.
 - Requiring employees to receive additional guidance on the risks of secondhand cannabis smoke.

FOOD SAFETY CONCERNs

- Serving cannabis infused food or drink alongside standard food and drink introduces complexity and risk. In cannabis cafés, retailers can prepare and sell non-cannabis food and beverages. However, non-cannabis food or beverage products must not be contaminated by or commingled with any cannabis products sold or served on the premises where cannabis consumption is allowed. State law requires that food and drink items and cannabis sold are to be kept separate.
- Facilities should follow stringent food-grade sanitation procedures similar to those recommended by the FDA Food Code. This includes separate and defined areas for different products.
- It is often difficult for edible testing labs to determine if contaminants or pesticides levels are too high due to the cannabis used or the non-cannabis food ingredients used in the product.

OVERALL PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS & PERCEPTION OF RISK

- Teens who perceive low risk of cannabis use are significantly more likely to use cannabis. In 2024, the proportion of adolescents (ages 12-17) who view monthly marijuana use as not harmful was 77.0%. While legalization and increased retail access do not consistently lead to more frequent use among adolescents, they are associated with greater social acceptability, which may influence perceived risk.
- Cannabis affects brain development. Developing brains, such as those in babies, children, and teenagers, are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of cannabis and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) because the brain is continuing to develop until around age 25. Cannabis use during this period can interfere with:
 - Memory and learning
 - Attention and decision-making
 - Emotional regulation and coordination
- Today's marijuana is stronger. Today's marijuana has more than 3 times the concentration of THC than marijuana from 25 years ago. More THC — the mind-altering chemical in marijuana — may lead to an increase in dependency and addiction.
- Cannabis negatively affects several skills required for safe driving, such as reaction time, coordination, and concentration.