

Single-unit packaging for cannabis edibles is associated with reduced cannabis poisonings among young children.

Thank you Chair Reynolds and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide information.

My name is Julia Dilley and I am an epidemiologist and principal investigator at Program Design and Evaluation Services with the Multnomah County Health Department. Since 2015, I have led a federally-funded research study on public health effects of cannabis legalization in Oregon and Washington. Today I am sharing some relevant results from our study that we are submitting to a scientific journal for publication.

We examined the effect of Washington's 2017 change in cannabis rules to require single-unit packaging for cannabis edible products, similar to the proposed bill. Washington made this change because of concerns about children being harmed from eating edible products.

We used data through 2024 from hospitalizations and poison center cases in both states. We used statistical models that accounted for background differences between the states. After legalization of cannabis for adult use, both states showed increasing cannabis-related health events among all age groups. For older groups, the patterns were similar between states. However, among children ages 1-6, the single-unit packaging policy in Washington was associated with relatively fewer cases: 75% fewer hospitalizations and half as many poisonings reported to poison centers. This means we saw several hundred fewer serious health events than expected among small children in Washington associated with the policy. Notably, we could only measure these most serious health events; many less serious events were also likely prevented.

Our findings are not surprising, as there is strong evidence about single-unit packaging reducing child poisoning from other medicinal products. It works because if a child finds some cannabis edibles it is a little harder for them to get into it at all, or they consume less (a single serving vs. as much as they can eat from a chocolate bar, for example).

We published an earlier version of these findings in 2024 (see reference), where we also show effects from a more recent policy change in Oregon about cannabis edibles: in April 2022, Oregon increased the maximum THC in a "serving" of cannabis edibles from 5 mg THC (up to 50 mg total per package) to 10 mg THC (up to 100mg total per package). We documented increases in child poisonings in Oregon following that policy change, in comparison to reductions in Colorado and stable lower rates in Washington during the same period. In 2023, at the conclusion of that prior report, Oregon had markedly higher rates of cannabis-related child poisonings than both Washington and Colorado.

Julia Dilley, PhD MES
julia.dilley@multco.us
Principal Investigator
Multnomah County Health Department
Program Design and Evaluation Services

Reference

Dilley, J. A., Hendrickson, R. G., Everson, E. M., & Jeanne, T. L. (2024). Monitoring Cannabis Adverse Events: Lessons From Edible Packaging Policies and Child Poisonings. *American journal of public health*, 114(S8), S631–S634. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2024.307789>

Photo

Examples of single-unit packaging for chocolate & gummy edible products from a Washington State cannabis retailer, 2022

