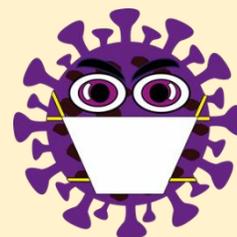


University Health and Counseling
Substance Misuse Prevention Newsletter: A Collection of Readings
COVID and Substance Misuse
Volume 3~ Issue 1



COVID and Substance Use

We have been hearing about the increase of substance use during quarantine and the pandemic.

“We know from previous disasters, such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina that the stress of the events and anxiety about the future can increase drinking and exacerbate symptoms of alcohol use disorder. We also know that feeling socially isolated, a possible effect of physical distancing, can worsen symptoms of anxiety or depression, which may encourage more alcohol intake. Indeed, the current COVID-19 crisis appears to have already fueled increases in retail alcohol sales. From the stress of unemployment to feelings of isolation during physical distancing, there are many reasons the COVID-19 emergency may be influencing alcohol consumption” ([NIH Directors Blog](#))

For some individuals, occasional use may have become more frequent and for others, who were attempting to reduce use, were abstinent or in recovery, the isolation, loneliness and quarantine may have triggered a relapse or a slip. For others who use recreationally they may not understand the increased susceptibility and risk substance use poses on the immune system during the pandemic.

Recovery Village conducted a survey about the use of substances during COVID. The key points from the article are as follows:

“The survey asked 1,000 American adults (ages 18 and older) about their use of drugs and alcohol in the past month. Some questions asked respondents to select each option that applied, so in a few instances, the total percentage will be greater than one hundred.

Additionally, many respondents displayed higher rates of drug and alcohol use. Of the respondents:

- 55% reported an increase in past-month alcohol consumption, with 18% reporting a significant increase
- 36% reported an increase in illicit drug use

- In the states hardest hit by the coronavirus (NY, NJ, MA, RI, CT), 67% reported an increase in past-month alcohol consumption, with 25% reporting a significant increase

The participants were asked why they were prompted to use substances within the last month. Of the respondents:

- 53% were trying to cope with stress
- 39% were trying to relieve boredom
- 32% were trying to cope with mental health symptoms, such as anxiety or depression”

To read more about this survey; [Drug and Alcohol Use During COVID](#)

The American Medical Association issues a brief on the increase of Opioid and other drug-related overdoses during COVID.

[Issue brief: Reports of increases in opioid- and other drug-related overdose and other concerns during COVID pandemic](#)

ABC News reported an increase in Opioid Overdoses during COVID:

[Opioid overdoses on the rise during COVID-19 pandemic, despite telemedicine care](#)

Stories Specific to Maine

[Overdose risk during pandemic is tragic reality for some families](#)

[Maine drug deaths rose as the state shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

SUBSTANCE USE AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

When a person struggles with substance abuse or addiction, they may experience several side effects from chronically ingesting these substances. Long-term struggles with alcohol or drugs can lead to considerable damage to many systems in the body, especially the immune system. The immune system may be harmed directly by intoxicating substances, or the way the drug is ingested may contribute to a higher risk of infection, coupled with a lower immune response.

To learn about specific drugs and the immune system continue reading; [How Drug Abuse Can Weaken or Suppress the Immune System](#)

VAPING

A recent study out of Stanford University School of Medicine showed that Young People who vape or use e-cigarettes were at higher risk for COVID-19 than those who did not. This elevated risk is due to the lung damage from using these devices.

Young People who were tested for COVID-19, those who had ever used e-cigarettes were 5 times more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 than nonusers were.

Those who had used both e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes in the previous 30 days were 6.8 times more likely to be diagnosed with the disease. To learn more:

[Vaping linked to COVID-19 risk in teens and young adults](#)

MARIJUANA

- Inhaling, smoking, or vaping cannabis products in the face of COVID-19 is not recommended because smoking of any kind can damage and weaken the lungs.
- There is not enough evidence to know the effects of cannabis on the immune system or on the susceptibility to viral infections.
- Too much marijuana use to manage anxiety can have an adverse effect and cause anxiety. Consider other ways of managing anxiety. Creating a routine that includes exercise, proper nutrition, meditation, and regular social interactions can help manage stress in a healthy way.
- If you are using cannabis to cope with stress and anxiety, reach out for help from a mental health professional.
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To read more: [Marijuana and COVID-19: What a Doctor Wants You to Know- Web MD](#)

EDIBLES

In places where cannabis is legal, some people have switched to edibles or other forms of cannabis.

This does not mean there is no risk.

- When someone smokes marijuana, they can tell how high they are getting and they can stop. With edibles, the effect can take up to two hours to feel and the individual has to ride it out because there is no turning back. There is a higher

risk of a “bad trip” or negative experience and the trip can last longer (6-10 hours).

- A person may not feel the effects of edibles for 30 minutes and sometimes up to two hours (or more). This delay often causes a person to take more, leading to marijuana intoxication/ overdose.
- The amount of THC in these products is hard to measure

To understand the risk of edibles: [Cannabis Edibles Aren't As Safe As People Think](#)

ALCOHOL

- Alcohol misuse has a negative impact on the immune system, causing inflammation, and interference with the body's immune response to viral and bacterial infections. Excessive alcohol damages the cells that line the lungs and is associated with acute respiratory distress syndrome.
- An impaired immune increases susceptibility to respiratory illness, which could contribute to more severe COVID-19.

To understand the influence of Alcohol on the immune system, read the National Institute of Health Directors Blog:

[Alcohol Poses Different Challenges during the COVID 19 Pandemic](#)

PRACTICE WELLNESS AND STAY SAFE.

FOR TIPS, visit; [University Health and Counseling website](#)

[Health, Wellness and Well-being](#)

A YouTube video from Stanford University;

[Dreaming of a Safe COVID 19 Vaccine](#)

For Comments on this, newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact: Diane Geyer, LCPC, LADC, CCS, NCC~ Clinician and Coordinator of Clinical Substance Use Services at USM~ Email: diane.geyer@maine.edu