

Pot 'dabbing' poses risk of serious burns, study warns

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Fires and even explosions have been linked to this practice, experts say.

(HealthDay)—A potentially hazardous form of marijuana use called "dabbing" is growing in popularity across the United States, researchers warn.

In dabbing, users inhale through a water pipe the vapor from "dabs" of waxy or solid marijuana concentrate. A piece of superheated metal or glass instantly vaporizes the dab, creating an intense high from a single inhalation.

But the dabs are created using highly volatile butane gas, and a number of fires, explosions and [severe burns](#) have been linked to the production of this marijuana concentrate, said study lead author John Stogner, an assistant professor of criminology at the University of North Carolina at

Charlotte.

"Given the amount of butane that can build up during this process, these individuals should be worried about any spark from any source," Stogner said.

Experts also are concerned about the high potency of the dabs, said Heather Senior, parent support network manager for the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids.

The crystallized resins created by the process can have a THC concentration approaching 80 percent, the study authors said. THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is the chemical compound in marijuana that causes intoxication.

"We know that it is more potent than smoking marijuana," Senior said. "You don't know what concentrate you're going to be getting. It's going to be a much higher dose, and kids might not be used to that."

The study findings were released online June 15 in *Pediatrics*.

Dabs, also known as butane hash oil, are created by stuffing marijuana trimmings into a glass, metal or plastic pipe, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. Butane is forced into the pipe, and the flammable liquid extracts THC from the plant material.

"There's a big danger of fire even if they aren't using some sort of heating device," Stogner said, noting that butane gas can build up in an enclosed space during the process. The smallest spark can prompt an explosion.

The number of butane explosions linked to dabs and hash oil has nearly tripled in Colorado, jumping from 12 in 2013 to 32 in 2014, according

to *USA Today*.

Last week, David Schultz, 33, of Bellevue, Wash., received a nine-year prison sentence for causing an explosion in an apartment complex while using butane to create marijuana concentrate.

Seven apartment dwellers, including Schultz, were hospitalized following the November 2013 explosion, and an 87-year-old woman died from injuries sustained when she fell while trying to escape from the building, according to the *Seattle Times*.

Producers of butane hash oil are at high risk, but so too are the people who get high from these substances, Stogner said.

Users of dabs risk severe burns from the piece of very hot metal or glass used to vaporize the dab, particularly if they are handling the device while already impaired, the study authors noted.

Experts also are worried about the other materials that might be contained in the vapor that users inhale. Some benzene likely remains in the dab, and the vapor might also contain gases released by superheated metal, rust and solder, the study authors said.

Dabbing is not a new process, and in previous decades also has been called "hot knifing," Stogner said.

Senior said dabbing is part of a growing trend in which teenagers are exploring different ways of using [marijuana](#), beyond smoking or eating it.

"The landscape is drastically changing, and parents need to start learning how to have conversations around this with their children," she said.

More information: For more information on the different ways marijuana is used, visit the [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#).

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