

Report explores factors that might attract children to marijuana edibles

August 26 2016, by Peter Kelley

When Washington legalized recreational marijuana in 2012, a primary concern was how to ensure it was kept out of the reach of children.

While skunky-smelling buds of dried marijuana are not likely to appeal to [children](#), cannabis-infused edibles such as brownies, cookies and candies could. And with edibles making up a sizable and growing segment of the pot market, states are grappling with how to regulate those products to most effectively protect children.

A new report from the University of Washington School of Law's Cannabis Law and Policy Project furthers those efforts by identifying the factors that make food attractive to children. Commissioned by the state Liquor and Cannabis Board, the report involved looking at research on what physical elements of food appeal to children and the role that marketing and branding play.

Among the report's findings:

- Color is a key factor in children's food choices, with red, orange, yellow and green foods preferred
- Food in novel shapes such as stars or animals is more appealing to children than food cut into slices or sticks
- Children like foods that smell sweet, fruity or like candy
- Taste, rather than smell, is a more useful deterrent for children
- Odor alone is unlikely to deter children
- Cartoon and other promotional characters powerfully influence

children's food preferences

- Advertising influences food and beverage choices among children aged 2 to 11, but there is less evidence that teens are swayed by food advertising

Sam Méndez, executive director of the Cannabis Law and Policy Project, said while the research focused on children's food preferences generally, the findings are applicable to how children might approach cannabis-infused edibles.

"There is scant research of testing children with cannabis-infused edibles, and for good ethical reasons," he said. "So we looked at research on regular food products, but the same factors that make particular foods appealing to children, such as taste, color and packaging, would likely also apply to edibles," he said.

The report also looked at marijuana cannabis packaging and labeling regulations in various states. Most states require edibles to be sold in child-resistant, opaque packaging. Washington introduced rules in 2014 prohibiting recreational marijuana cannabis stores from selling gummy bears, lollipops and cotton candy infused with cannabis, and also prohibits cannabis products that require cooking or baking.

Méndez said cannabis-infused edibles are sometimes packaged in less-regulated states to look like popular candy or food brands—for example, "Pot Tarts" that have the same cartoonish font and blue background as Kellogg's well-known toaster pastries.

"In some states where there's medical marijuana [cannabis](#) but not a strong hand in regulation, you get products that would be very attractive to children, and that's seen as a hazard," he said.

"We review all edible products and packaging to ensure they are not

especially appealing to children," said Liquor and Cannabis Board Director Rick Garza. "This new study will help further that important responsibility."

The report, Méndez said, underscores the complex set of determinants that drives children's food preferences.

"Of these factors we looked at, no one factor was clearly indicative of a danger to children," he said. "So if you have a food that's shaped as a bear, that doesn't automatically make it attractive to kids, especially if it smells or tastes bad.

"It's more of a multifactor test, and you need to factor in all of these things that can help give you an idea about whether a [food](#) could be more attractive to children."

Provided by University of Washington

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