

Packaging and health warnings are key in discouraging youths from using cannabis

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As more countries consider legalizing non-medical cannabis, new research shows that prominent health warnings and less attractive packaging should be mandated to reduce its appeal to children.

In a recent study, researchers from the University of Waterloo found that the amount of advertising and promotion provided on packages changes how people see the product—whether they think it's fun to use, are interested in trying it, or believe it's harmful.

"For a child who's entering the market and trying to figure out if cannabis is a product their friends would think is cool, and that they can project an image with it, that's exactly what brand [imagery](#) and promotion does, especially on packages," said David Hammond, a professor in Waterloo's School of Public Health Sciences. "So, if states or countries are interested in protecting youth, our data suggest that packaging restrictions and comprehensive [health](#) warnings are effective ways of doing that.

"The more imagery legislators allow, the more appealing these [cannabis products](#) will be to the public, especially children. It's up to governments to figure out where to draw the line."

To determine the effectiveness of restricted brand imagery and information from governments in the form of health warnings on how cannabis products are perceived, the team of researchers gathered input from 45,378 randomized participants in Canada and the United States. The participants were presented with four branding conditions, ranging from no brand imagery and uniform colors to full brand imagery. They were also asked to assess how the products' appeal differed based on perceived harm and how easy it is to remember [warning](#) messages, which addressed pregnancy, adolescent risk and impaired driving.

The researchers found that reducing the amount of [brand](#) imagery modestly decreased product appeal. Additionally, products were rated significantly less harmful when they had a white background with no or limited branding than a colored background, and message recall was substantially higher for Canadian versus US health warnings.

"Canada's warning messages on cannabis products are more salient and easier to understand than in US," Hammond said. "And our findings suggest that Canada's comprehensive regulations appear to be achieving their goal, which is to inform consumers about risks and reducing appeal, including among young people."

The study, Influence of package color, branding and health warnings on [appeal](#) and perceived harm of cannabis products among respondents in Canada and the US, authored by Hammond, Samantha Goodman, Vicki Rynard and Maryan Iraniparast, will appear in the journal *Preventive Medicine*.

More information: Samantha Goodman et al, Influence of package colour, branding and health warnings on appeal and perceived harm of cannabis products among respondents in Canada and the US, *Preventive Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106788](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106788)

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