

Poison center calls for 'magic mushrooms' spiked after decriminalization, study finds

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Calls to U.S. poison centers involving psilocybin, or "magic mushrooms," among adolescents and young adults rose sharply after several U.S. cities and states began decriminalizing the hallucinogen,

University of Virginia School of Medicine researchers have found. The researchers have published their findings in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Psilocybin-related calls more than tripled among teens ages 13–19 from 152 to 464 and more than doubled among adults ages 20–25 from 125 to 294 between 2018 and 2022, according to anonymized data gathered from the National Poison Data System. Local and state efforts to decriminalize the possession, use and cultivation of [psilocybin](#) began in May 2019. Oregon and Colorado have decriminalized psilocybin, as have several cities, including Washington, D.C., Detroit and Seattle.

By comparison, the number of psilocybin-related calls to poison centers for patients ages 13–25 was largely unchanged between 2013 and 2018, the researchers found.

"It is markedly concerning to me that children are gaining access to these products," said Christopher Holstege, MD, director of UVA Health's Blue Ridge Poison Center and chief of the Division of Medical Toxicology at the UVA School of Medicine.

"We have limited data on the potential long-term consequences on the developing brains of children when exposed to such compounds that impact the brain's neurotransmission. We also do not understand fully why some individuals have markedly adverse complications to psilocybin, known as 'bad trips,' that can lead to harm to the individual taking or others who may be victims of violent behavior."

Psilocybin's effects

During the 10 years examined in the study, most calls involved intentional consumption of psilocybin (81.1% of calls for ages 13–19 and 78.3% of calls for ages 20–25). Males accounted for about 75% of

the calls in both age groups.

Approximately 75% of the youths ages 13–19 and 72% of the [young adults](#) required some type of medical attention after being exposed solely to psilocybin. The researchers found that the most common effects of the drug were hallucinations or delusions (36.6% of calls), agitation (27.6%), abnormally fast heart rate (20.2%) and confusion (16%).

The powerful psychological effects of psilocybin can, even in moderate doses, cause [adverse reactions](#) that can include anxiety, disorientation, fear, grief, paranoia and panic attacks. Psilocybin-induced impairments in judgment and perception can contribute to dangerous behavior, accidents, self-harming and even a risk of suicide. There are reports of deaths from falls or jumps from tall buildings attributed to psilocybin use.

The researchers note that the increase in psilocybin-related calls among young people from 2018–2022 is "particularly alarming" because the hallucinogen's use is banned for those ages 21 and younger even in cities and states where it has been decriminalized.

"As psilocybin may become more widely available, it is important for parents to be aware that psilocybin is also available in edible forms such as chocolate and gummies," said Rita Farah, PharmD, MPH, Ph.D., the Blue Ridge Poison Center epidemiologist. "And we learned from our experience with edible cannabis that young children can mistake edibles for candy."

More information: Rita Farah et al, Psilocybin Exposures Reported to US Poison Centers: National Trends Over a Decade, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2024.01.027 , dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2024.01.027

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