

Drug Rehab Experts: Limit Access to Marijuana Edibles

SPRING HILL, Fla. (PRNewswire) — Although food infused with marijuana is not a new invention, the legalization of recreational marijuana has made edibles more widely available. State-licensed stores can now supply professionally manufactured edibles to adults looking for an alternative to smoking. But the high associated with edibles is known to trap inexperienced users into easily overdosing, because the effects take longer to kick in than from smoking, leading people to eat much more than required—a fact which has reportedly led to two deaths in Colorado, [the first state to legalize the recreational sale and use of marijuana](#) [1]a (1). Florida drug treatment center Suncoast Rehabilitation Center says that the increasing availability of marijuana edibles—coupled with rising levels of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana—can potentially lead to harmful, or even deadly, behavior among users.

According to industry experts, [the amount of marijuana in edibles](#) [2] can vary widely, and in some cases, the levels are so high that people report extreme paranoia and anxiety bordering on psychotic behavior (1) Two high-profile deaths connected to edible marijuana products have led Colorado lawmakers to revisit current regulations as experts warn of bizarre behavior with consumers eating powerful pot-infused foods:

- A college student jumped to his death March 11th from a Denver hotel balcony after eating a marijuana cookie. Witnesses told police that Levi Thamba Pongji, 19, was rambling incoherently after eating a large serving of the doped cookie. The Denver coroner ruled that "marijuana intoxication" was a significant factor in his death.
- Richard Kirk of Denver faces first-degree murder charges stemming from the fatal shooting of his wife inside their home in April. Kirk's wife called 911 to report that he was hallucinating and rambling after eating marijuana candy and taking prescription medication. Kristine Kirk died while on the phone with a police dispatcher (1).

Under regulations that took effect in late April, edible marijuana products cannot contain more than 100 mg of THC, pot's hallucinogenic ingredient that is proven to change thinking and cause delusions when consumed (2). But there are currently no standards for the size of those products, meaning that one candy bar can contain the same amount of THC as an entire bag of cookies (1). And studies show that THC levels in marijuana are rising, and have been for some time:

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- The average THC level of all seized cannabis has increased from a concentration of 3.4 percent in 1993 to nearly 9 percent in 2008;
- THC levels found in sinsemilla (the flowering tops of unfertilized female plants) have jumped from 5.8 percent to 13.4 percent during that same time period (3).
- THC levels as high as 37 percent have also been found in certain marijuana strains (4).

The increasing potency of marijuana, along with unregulated edibles and their availability, is due to an overzealous belief of marijuana's harmlessness and a lack of state oversight—a combination which can potentially lead to even more devastating consequences, per Tammy Strickling, Suncoast Executive Director.

Colorado medical facilities received 79 calls regarding marijuana incidents during the first four months of the year, roughly twice as many as before the state legalized pot for anyone 21 or over; nearly half of this year's calls involved edibles (5).

"We, as a society, are running the risk of seeing a snowball effect," said Strickling. "Untested, unregulated marijuana edibles are made available, yet there is no 'safe' recommended serving size—and that puts the lives of the public at risk."

Strickling maintains that the key to reducing the likelihood of death, overdose or other lethal consequences due to marijuana use is by limiting, rather than increasing, access to drugs such as marijuana. Furthermore, public education on the potential dangers of drug abuse is critical.

Suncoast enables its clients to take the first step in conquering addiction and reclaiming their lives from drugs. Suncoast's medical team designs treatment programs to physically address the malnutrition created by substance abuse, and the Suncoast counseling team tailors client therapy to help provide insight into the past—all intended to help addicts confront life better, and without reverting to drugs. Ninety percent of Suncoast's clients began their drug use with marijuana before graduating to harder narcotics—a statistic which led the facility to join the Florida Sheriffs Association in order to educate Floridians about the dangerous consequences of marijuana legalization.

About Suncoast Rehab Center:

Located in Spring Hill, Florida, Suncoast Rehab Center provides long-term residential treatment, intensive sauna detoxification, life skills and cognitive therapy and counseling. Suncoast is licensed by the Florida Department of Children and Families, and was recently awarded a 100% inspection score for the fourth year

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in a row. Suncoast has a mission to educate youth and adults about drugs and their dangers, with the aim of preventing future drug use and abuse. Suncoast handles the physical deficiencies, weakness and problems created through drug use, without the use of additional drugs. Clients are helped to uncover the issues that led to their drug use through counseling, therapy and life skills that put the clients back in control of their lives and their future. Suncoast's purpose in drug rehabilitation is to heal the whole person and give the person tools and education to remain drug-free. For more information, visit www.suncoastrehabcenter.com [3].

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