

## Appendix 2: Adolescent Health Offer: the health impact of misusing substances and early sexual relationships.

- 1.1. Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to the effects of substance misuse (including cannabis and drinking alcohol) because their brains are still developing<sup>1</sup>. Those who use cannabis particularly at a younger age have a higher than average risk of developing a psychotic illness. Regular, early substance misuse is linked to addiction in adult life and cannabis use at an early stage is associated with mental health issues even after abstaining for at least a year.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.2. NHS England provide the key facts on cannabis<sup>3</sup>: The effects of cannabis vary from person to person:
  - you may feel chilled out, relaxed and happy
  - some people get the giggles or become more talkative
  - hunger pangs ("the munchies") are common
  - colours may look more intense and music may sound better
  - time may feel like it's slowing down
- 1.3. Cannabis can have other effects too:
  - if you're not used to it, you may feel faint or sick
  - it can make you sleepy and lethargic
  - it can affect your memory
  - it makes some people feel confused, anxious or paranoid, and some experience panic attacks and hallucinations – this is more common with stronger forms of cannabis like skunk or spice
  - it interferes with your ability to drive safely

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<sup>1</sup> Konrad K, Firk C, Uhlhaas PJ: Brain development during adolescence: neuroscientific insights into this developmental period. Dtsch Arztebl Int 2013; 110(25): 425–31. Available from URL: <https://www.aerzteblatt.de/pdf/DI/110/25/m425.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Public Health England (PHE). Specialist substance misuse services for young people A rapid mixed methods evidence review of current provision and main principles for commissioning. 2017 Jan. Available from URL: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/583218/Specialist\\_substance\\_misuse\\_services\\_for\\_young\\_people.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583218/Specialist_substance_misuse_services_for_young_people.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Key Facts on Cannabis: NHS Choices: 2017 <https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/drugs/Pages/cannabis-facts.aspx>

- 1.4. If you use cannabis regularly, it can make you demotivated and uninterested in other things going on in your life, such as education or work. Long-term use can affect your ability to learn and concentrate.
- 1.5. Researchers from the University of Bristol have found regular and occasional cannabis use as a teen is associated with a greater risk of other illicit drug taking in early adulthood. The study by Bristol's Population Health Science Institute, published online in the Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, also found cannabis use was associated with harmful drinking and smoking<sup>4</sup>
- 1.6 One in five adolescents follow a pattern of occasional or regular cannabis use and that those individuals are more likely to be tobacco dependant, have harmful levels of alcohol consumption or use other illicit drugs in early adulthood.
- 1.7 The long term effects of alcohol are well evidenced and include<sup>5</sup>:
  - Young people who drink are also much more susceptible to long-term damage to their health and more likely to be involved in an accident and in hospital.
  - 15-year olds who drink once or twice a week are likely to score significantly lower at GCSE – the difference between A\* and E.
  - For each year during adolescence a young person doesn't drink alcohol, they are 10% less likely to misuse alcohol as an adult. Delaying the age when teenagers start to drink means their prospects are happier, wealthier and healthier.
- 1.8 In 2016, the Chief Medical Officer of England published the first official guidance on alcohol aimed specifically at children and young people.<sup>6</sup> It recommended that the healthiest and safest option was for children to remain alcohol free up to age 18. If they did drink alcohol it should not be at least until the age of 15. For young people aged 15 to 17, it is suggested they should only drink in a supervised environment, and no more than once a week. The 2012 Alcohol Strategy<sup>7</sup> had a particular focus on excessive drinking by adults,

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2017/june/cannabisuse.html>

<sup>5</sup> Mentor-Adepis.org Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Information. <http://mentor-adepis.org/prevention/>

<sup>6</sup> Official Guidance on Alcohol and Young People: Drink Aware: 2016  
<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking/the-law/>

<sup>7</sup> The Governments Alcohol Strategy; MH Government: 2012  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/224075/alcohol-strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224075/alcohol-strategy.pdf)

but also included the ambition to achieve ‘a sustained reduction in both the numbers of 11 to 15 year olds drinking alcohol and the amounts consumed’

- 1.9 Smoking remains a significant public health challenge and is the leading cause of death and illness in the UK. Approximately 207,000 children start smoking each year and two thirds of adult smokers report starting smoking under 18. Smoking is linked with coronary heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The earlier children become regular smokers, the greater the risk of ill health. People who smoke between one and 14 cigarettes a day are eight times more likely to die from lung cancer than non-smokers<sup>8</sup>. One of the national ambitions in the government’s new Tobacco Control Plan published in 2017<sup>9</sup>, is to reduce the number of 15 year olds who regularly smoke to 3% or less.
- 1.10 Teenage pregnancy is strongly associated with deprivation and social exclusion. Having children at a young age can damage young women’s health and well-being and limit their education and career prospects. While some young people can be competent parents, studies show that children born to teenagers are more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes in later life, and are up to three times more likely to become a teenage parent themselves. Young fathers are twice as likely to be unemployed aged 30, even after taking account of the effects of deprivation<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Action on Smoking and Health. 2015 Jun. Smoking Still Kills: Protecting Children, Reducing Inequalities. 15 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

<sup>9</sup> “Towards a Smokefree Generation”, Tobacco Control Plan: Department of Health July 2017. <http://ash.org.uk/about-ash/all-party-parliamentary-group-on-smoking-health/new-tobacco-control-plan-for-england-published/>

<sup>10</sup> Teenage Pregnancy National Support Team. Effective Public Health Practice. 2011 Apr. Available from URL: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/21633](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/21633)

