



# STUDENTS AND CANNABIS:

## What You Need to Know | Fall 2024

Grinnell College is committed to promoting holistic wellness for all students. We take a public health approach to cannabis use, focusing on risk factors that – combined with cannabis use – may have a negative impact on students’ physical and mental health and on their academic success. We take a similar approach to prevention of negative consequences resulting from underage alcohol and other drug use.

### Why are you receiving this information?

Public health research shows that parents and guardians discussing cannabis use with their student has a positive impact. **Our goal is to give you regulatory and science-based information and tips you can use to have important conversations with your college student.**

### How is cannabis regulated in Iowa?

We recognize that students come to Grinnell College from places where cannabis may be regulated differently than it is in Iowa. Under Iowa law it is illegal to intentionally or knowingly possess cannabis.

- Possession of cannabis for personal use is a misdemeanor charge. Possession with the intent to distribute is a felony charge that can come with substantial jail time, which can increase significantly if the drug is sold to a minor.
- Cultivating and growing cannabis in the state of Iowa is also subject to felony charges.

- Iowa law also means that individuals can be convicted under constructive possession. An individual who knows what it is, where it is, and can exercise control over it can be considered guilty of possession (for example, if you are driving with a friend that has cannabis in the car, you may be charged with constructive possession).
- In Iowa, medical use allows for possession only for registered Iowa cardholder patients or caregivers and does not permit possession of plants or THC-infused edibles.
- 14.6% of Grinnell students who use cannabis reported driving within six hours of using the drug. Driving while under the influence of THC is prohibited.

### What should I know about the health effects of cannabis?

- **Today’s typical cannabis is on average five times more potent and may carry greater risk than what was used in past decades.**
- **Cannabis can worsen and/or raise the risk of mental health problems.** Regular cannabis use can contribute to the onset of mental health problems or worsen symptoms of existing problems. There is evidence that cannabis creates a higher risk for active psychosis, mood disorder, or substance abuse disorder in those who have genetic predisposition. It can increase the number of negative thoughts felt by those with existing anxiety and depression. Depression and suicide are a greater risk with cannabis dependency.

- **Grinnell College's own data** from the National College Health Assessment show that there is a statistically significant increase in the following conditions among students who use cannabis: anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, stress, and suicide consideration. Students who use cannabis are also more likely to binge drink.
- **It is possible to become addicted to cannabis.** Cannabis is addictive, and those who start early in life and/or use regularly have an increased risk of addiction.

### What should I know about how cannabis use affects academic performance?

- About half of Grinnell students report using cannabis at some point. Twenty percent report having used cannabis in the two weeks before the survey. Of those, about 9.5% reported that cannabis use negatively impacted their academic performance. Because this information is self-reported, there are likely students who do not realize that their academic performance was negatively impacted by cannabis use.
- Using cannabis has a negative impact on executive function, impairing attention, concentration, decision-making, inhibition, impulsivity, and working memory, according to the National Institutes of Health. Effects can linger for between seven hours and 20 days after last use.
- Research at the University of Maryland School of Public Health found that students who used cannabis more frequently tended to skip more classes, leading to a lower GPA. GPAs dropped with increase of cannabis use and improved with decline of use.

### How can I talk to my student about cannabis use?

- The American College Health Association reports that 84% of students take their parents' rules and expectations about alcohol and other drug use seriously. Those students who have better relationships with their parents are more likely to delay drinking and have lower alcohol use.
- In any situation, you can support your student in a conversation by focusing on their positive qualities, offering them support, being a reliable source of information for your student, remaining non-judgmental, and seeking additional resources if you are concerned about your student.
- If your student chooses not to use cannabis, support them in this choice. We know that any cannabis use increases health risks, and not using is the safest choice. It's also the choice of half of Grinnell College students.

Visit [CollegeParentsMatter.org/Cannabis](https://CollegeParentsMatter.org/Cannabis) for more information and conversation tips. Have the conversation.

### Grinnell College Resources

- Student Health and Wellness  
641-269-3230, [shaw@grinnell.edu](mailto:shaw@grinnell.edu)
- Counseling Services
- Need to Talk? 24/7 Counseling Hotline:  
641-269-4404

Please note that all students must sign the **Authorization to Release/Exchange Information** before any protected health information can be released to anyone, including parents/guardians. This form must be signed before a SHAW provider or staff member can discuss your student's health information with you. We realize that this is sometimes inconvenient; however, your student's privacy is our priority.