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Are Unregulated Cannabis Products Like Delta 8 THC Harmful? A Physician's Perspective

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After the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, a large amount of hemp flower biomass and CBD became cheaply available. This led to the extraction and creation of innovative hemp-derived BUT intoxicating products on the market, starting with delta-8-THC.

Manufacturing of these compounds, some of which are not native to the plant, is used to create other intoxicating or hallucinogenic products to produce new synthetic and semi-synthetic cannabinoids. These compounds are chemically similar to delta-9-THC. They will test positive in a laboratory as delta-9-THC or marijuana. They have been marketed as legal alternatives to delta-9-THC in states where marijuana remains illegal or is heavily regulated only because they come from a “non-delta-9-THC” product. Yet, they produce similar effects. Their use can result in impairment, especially in higher doses. Side effects include dry mouth, red eyes, increased heart rate, coordination problems, and anxiety, all known side effects of delta-9-THC/ marijuana.

The beneficial effects of these consumed products are unknown. There are no known peer-reviewed studies or clinical trials specifically focused on chemically synthesized THC. This lack of data makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the safety profile of these products, especially when there are many unknowns regarding adverse effects from the synthesis or quantity of intoxicating products in each serving.

Physicians and consumers should be aware of the many concerns surrounding these unregulated products.

From a physician's perspective, the concerns for unregulated THC include:

1. Lack of standardized dosing: Without regulation, there is no guarantee of the potency or purity of THC products, making it difficult for physicians to recommend and monitor effects based on dosing for patients accurately. In the event of an adverse effect, treatment is compromised by a lack of dosing knowledge and consistency.

2. Potential for harmful additives: Unregulated THC products may contain harmful additives or contaminants, such as pesticides, heavy metals, or synthetic cannabinoids, which can pose serious health risks to consumers. These contaminants are unknown and unregulated, so consumer safety is at risk.

3. Increased risk of adverse effects: Inconsistencies in product quality and potency can lead to unpredictable and potentially harmful effects, such as increased anxiety, psychosis, or cardiovascular problems. Overdosage is a considerable and, unfortunately, an often-occurring event, particularly for the most vulnerable- children and adults who see the purchase of these products as safe, given their accessibility outside of a regulated dispensary.

4. Lack of oversight: Without regulation, there is no oversight to ensure that THC products are produced, labeled, and marketed responsibly, potentially leading to misrepresentation or false claims about the product's safety and efficacy. These products are sold to consumers in many markets that do not ensure safe testing and labeling. The easy availability of these products belies the potential risks for consumers who believe it is safe because it is available on a shelf for purchase.

5. Legal implications: Physicians may face legal and ethical challenges when recommending or prescribing THC products from unregulated sources, as they do not meet the same standards of safety and efficacy as regulated marijuana from dispensaries. Just like consumers, physicians should be aware that products available for sale outside dispensaries are not under the strict regulatory oversight of the [Division of Cannabis Regulation / Department of Health and Senior Services in Missouri](#).

Overall, these unregulated THC products pose a significant risk to patient safety and well-being. **In this physician's professional opinion, if you don't know both what's in these cannabis products and what negative effects they could have on your health, they should be avoided or considered unsafe to consume.**