

APPENDIX 4

SUPPLEMENTS TO CHAPTER 18

Section 18.6 Cannabis and breastfeeding

The prevalence of cannabis use among pregnant women varies from 1.2 to 34%, depending on the populations studied and the socio-economic background from which they come. The highest prevalence rates were observed in indigenous populations for whom the substance may be used in certain rituals. In Western societies, cannabis use among women of childbearing age has been on the rise for the past 30 years, with a prevalence of between 3% and 4%.

In Québec, according to the 2019 Québec Cannabis Survey, nearly 46% of people aged 15 and over reported having used cannabis. In the 12 months preceding the survey, 16% of Quebecers aged 15 and over reported having used cannabis. This prevalence is lower among women than among men. Cannabis use has increased among both men and women over the past 2 years. Among women aged 15 and over, 9.1% had used cannabis in the previous 3 months, compared with 7.9% in 2018.

Cannabis is known to be smoked as a joint (cigarette) or with a pipe. Dried cannabis and cannabis resin can also be consumed in a vaporiser such as the Volcano, which is increasingly used in hospitals for patients with advanced cancer. Cannabis oil can be ingested directly with a dropper, swallowed in capsules or in food. There are cannabis-based topical gels and creams, but these are not legally available in Québec due to regulations introduced by the Québec government. Finally, natural and/or synthetic medical cannabis can be administered in spray form, such as Sativex.

There are 3 main species of cannabis plant: *sativa*, *indica* and *ruderalis*. Consumers usually use *sativa* during the day to stay awake and productive, and look for the relaxing and sedative effects of *indica* in the evening. Almost no *ruderalis* plants are produced in Canada.

Cannabis users may seek several effects from cannabis: in addition to the euphoric sensation, they may enjoy relaxation, using it as a sleeping pill or as an anxiolytic. Some people will be looking for new experiences or sensations, trying to ward off boredom and discomfort or seeking a sense of belonging or influence. Finally, other people will use cannabis as an alternative to more dangerous substances, such as opiates.

The endocannabinoid system

According to Health Canada (2018), the endocannabinoid system (ECS) plays a very large role in regulating a vast number of physiological and pathophysiological processes, including nervous system development, immune and cardiovascular function, inflammation, appetite, metabolism and energy homeostasis, digestion, bone density and development, synaptic plasticity and learning, pain, reproduction, psychiatric disease, psychomotor behaviour, memory, wake cycles and sleep, as well as the

regulation of stress, emotional state and mood. For the moment, we do not know whether or how cannabis may affect the endocannabinoid system in breast-fed children, either in the short or long term.