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Overdose of Edible Marijuana by Teens a Growing Concern in USVI; V.I.P.D., D.O.H. and D.O.E. Form Task Force

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Cannabis infused chocolate. By. GETTY IMAGES

Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, assistant Dept. of Health commissioner has disclosed that there is growing evidence that young people are abusing cannabis/marijuana edibles, and a VIPD-led task force is being formed to come up with a strategy for this growing public health concern.

She said young people in schools are using the edibles without understanding the side and possible long-term effects of these edibles that look and in some instances taste like candy.

“Hence a task force is being pulled together involving the Department of Health, Education, V.I.P.D. to name a few. What has to happen is that we need to face realities and the fact that contraband is not new, contraband was on campus when I was in high school, when parents were in high school — it is a matter of addressing the change and the shift in how it is presented,” she said Monday during the Bryan administration's weekly press briefing.

Explaining that edibles are food or drink products that typically contain the chemicals found in the cannabis plant, Dr. Syms is recommending that parents, guardians, teachers, and just about anyone associated with youths have an open discussion about them.

She said cannabis edibles may look very similar to genuine products because they often appear in similar packaging to branded names and children may not know the difference. “The reality is they look delicious and some of them taste just like candy. However, as much as you may not want to admit it, there are young people who are impulsive or thrill-seeking and consider pushers in our schools, in that system where our children thrive,” she shared.

Elaborating further she said young people who use the edibles may develop certain psychosis behavior, and she urged parents to talk about the dangers of edibles as students of all ages have access to cannabis-infused cookies, brownies, candies, etc.

Dr. Syms also called for a shift in marijuana education in which parents, guidance, and educators should not take an approach that will have ramifications. “These conversations must happen without ramifications...you can sit and literally ask young people what you know about edible marijuana? have you tried it? have you seen it? what does it look like? and honestly speak to your child or children of how hard it can be to refuse when approached,” she suggested.

“You can speak to them and let them know that even when edibles arrive even in accurate packaging, teenagers have no idea how much THC – the main psychoactive chemical in cannabis — they are actually ingesting. For instance, a single brownie or cookie is meant to be ingested in multi-servings. If you are taking something that is homemade from another student or whomever, you have no idea the levels of THC it contains,” she said.

In conversations with youth, make it clear that consuming too much marijuana can negatively impact their central nervous and cardiovascular systems, Dr. Syms advised. “Please understand that edibles are tricky, the effects are delayed. It is easy to feel that the effects of edibles are not working or you don't feel anything at all because the effects can take up to 60 minutes,” she said.

Dr. Syms said that when there is no immediate effect, some young people continue consuming the edibles and that can cause an overdose. “Next thing you are walking on the moon in the middle of class and have no idea how to control yourself or your actions,” she said. “You might feel panic and lose track of where you are or what you are doing, your heart will race, some persons tend to upchuck (vomit), and you can end up in the emergency room.”