

Lay summary - Impact of maternal cannabis use in utero on the neurodevelopment of the gut-brain axis

Elyanne M. Ratcliffe (PI) : McMaster University

Sandeep Raha (co-PI) : McMaster University

The legalization of cannabis in Canada is bringing new challenges for the health care system, and for the decision making of pregnant and parenting people. Estimates for cannabis use among pregnant people range to >10% in Canadian urban cities. While cannabis products are not recommended during pregnancy, pregnant people with lived experience report perceived benefits of symptom management during pregnancy. Cannabis is already known to work on both the brain and the gut, and that early life is an important time for the formation of the nervous system of the gut and for how to gut connects to the brain. We also know that influences from the outside world, such as medications taken during pregnancy, and the way bacteria normally colonize babies, can change how these gut-brain connections work. Our expert team wants to find out if use of cannabis during pregnancy can affect how the gut and the brain form connections, and lead to problems with feeding, heartburn, abdominal discomfort, and constipation. Parenting people are asking for higher quality information so they can make informed decisions regarding cannabis use.