

# Marijuana use associated with lower death rates in patients with traumatic brain injuries

LA BioMed researchers surveyed emergency patients tested for THC levels

LOS ANGELES BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT HARBOR-UCLA MEDICAL CENTER (LA BIOMED)

LOS ANGELES - (Oct. 2, 2014) - Surveying patients with traumatic brain injuries, a group of Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute (LA BioMed) researchers reported today that they found those who tested positive for THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, were more likely to survive than those who tested negative for the illicit substance.

The findings, published in the October edition of *The American Surgeon*, suggest THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, may help protect the brain in cases of traumatic brain injury, the researchers said. The study included 446 patients who suffered traumatic brain injuries and underwent a urine test for the presence of THC in their system. The researchers found 82 of the patients had THC in their system. Of those, only 2.4% died. Of the remaining patients who didn't have THC in their system, 11.5% died.

"Previous studies conducted by other researchers had found certain compounds in marijuana helped protect the brain in animals after a trauma," said David Plurad, MD, an LA BioMed researcher and the study's lead author. "This study was one of the first in a clinical setting to specifically associate THC use as an independent predictor of survival after traumatic brain injury."

The researchers noted that the timing of their study was "pertinent" because of current efforts to decriminalize marijuana and other research that has shown THC can increase appetite, reduce ocular pressure, decrease muscle spasms, relieve pain and alleviate symptoms associated with irritable bowel disease. But they noted that their study has some significant limitations.

"While most - but not all - the deaths in the study can be attributed to the traumatic brain injury itself, it appears that both groups were similarly injured," Dr. Plurad said. "The similarities in the injuries between the two groups led to the conclusion that testing positive for THC in the system is associated with a decreased mortality in adult patients who have sustained traumatic brain injuries."

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## About LA BioMed

Founded in 1952, LA BioMed is one of the country's leading nonprofit independent biomedical research institutes. It has approximately 100 principal researchers conducting studies into improved treatments and cures for cancer, inherited diseases, infectious diseases, illnesses caused by environmental factors and more. It also educates young scientists and provides community services, including prenatal counseling and childhood nutrition programs. LA BioMed is academically affiliated with the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and located on the campus of Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. For more information, please visit <http://www.LABioMed.org>

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