

Legal Risks



Marijuana is currently a controlled substance in Canada under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA). It is a criminal offense to export, import, possess, grow, sell, give or traffic marijuana, or to possess marijuana for the purpose of trafficking. Such offences can result in a criminal conviction and carry a criminal punishment.

Convictions for any of these offences may result in a fine and /or punishment. A conviction can:

- lead to deportation for immigrants
- restrict a person's freedom to travel to other countries.
- ruin a person's credibility when trying to find a job.
- prevent them from entering certain professions.

Changes to the legal status of marijuana were proposed in previous sessions of parliament. However, at this time, the laws remain the same.

Each country has its own laws regarding drugs. Some of them are more severe than in Canada. If you break the law in another country you are subject to that country's judicial system. Being Canadian doesn't exempt you from those local laws. If you possess marijuana while travelling you can end up paying a fine, or spending time in jail.



Facts, Info & Statistics



Marijuana is a green, brown or grey mixture of dried shredded flowers and leaves derived from the *cannabis* plant.

Slang terms for Marijuana Include: Weed, Chronic, Pot, Mary Jane, Grass, Ganja, Reefer and many more...

Marijuana is commonly bought and sold by grams. A gram is about one twenty-eighth of an ounce. A typical tobacco cigarette is about a gram and a half.

Most users roll the loose marijuana into a cigarette called a "joint" or, "spliff." It can be smoked in pipes or bongs. It can be mixed into foods or used to brew tea. It can be used to replace the tobacco in cigars or cigarettes.

The main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana is THC (delta 9-tetrahydrocannabinol) which affects parts of the brain linked to emotion, movement, perception and sensation.

Marijuana smoke contains more than 400 chemicals. Some of these are same cancer causing chemicals found in tobacco smoke. The concentration of one cancer-producing agent, benzopyrene, may be even higher in marijuana smoke than in tobacco.

Most high school students—almost 75%—did not use marijuana in the last year.

Cannabis use increases with grade, from 3% among 7th graders to 45% among 12th graders. Use more than doubles from grade 8 to grade 9 (from almost 7% to 21%).

About one fifth (19%) of cannabis users use the drug on a weekly basis and an additional 10% use on a daily basis.

About one in nine (12%) cannabis users report a dependence problem.



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References:

- “Drug Use Among Ontario Students” (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2007)
- “Straight Talk About Marijuana” (Health Canada, 2003)

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Marijuana: Risks & Realities



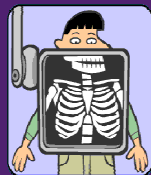
Risks



To the respiratory system

Smoking marijuana releases tar into the lungs in the same way that smoking tobacco does. There are more than 400 chemicals in marijuana smoke, some of which can affect the lungs, throat and esophagus.

Marijuana may cause chronic cough and chronic or recurring bronchitis.



To concentration and learning

Regular use of marijuana interferes with the ability to concentrate and impairs learning and some aspects of memory. This can affect a person's studies and the quality of their work, at school or on the job.

Marijuana can temporarily take over the body's key memory storage centre.



Risks



To coordination and safety

Marijuana slows down reflexes and decreases coordination and balance.

Any activity requiring concentration, good judgment, good sight, coordination, timing or fast reactions may be dangerous for those who are high on marijuana.

Marijuana can pose serious safety risks while operating machinery, driving a car, or even crossing the street.

To mood and mental health

Some people become very fearful, anxious or depressed when they use marijuana.

In people that are at high risk for schizophrenia, such as those with a family history of the disorder, marijuana use may trigger psychotic episodes.

Problems, Dependency and Addiction

A growing number of marijuana users report problems with the drug—that it interferes with their relationships, school work and family. More than a third say they have tried to cut down on their use. Regular users of marijuana may become dependent, meaning they do not feel that they can function without marijuana and will, therefore, continue to use it despite the problems it is causing in their lives.

Marijuana withdrawal symptoms include troubled sleep, irritability, anxiety, nausea, headaches, sweating and loss of appetite. These symptoms can last for 7 to 10 days.

Myths & Realities



Myth: Marijuana is natural so it's safe!

Just because a plant occurs in nature does not mean that it is safe!

Hydroponics and special soil-less growing techniques and lighting arrangements are being used in grow houses for the production of marijuana. In these grow operations, the marijuana seeds and plants are carefully chosen to produce higher levels of THC. A risk is that pesticides and herbicides are being used to reduce the threat of insect or other plant diseases. There is no quality control for marijuana growers so the pesticides and herbicides may not be eliminated properly which may cause illness among users. What also remains an unknown with marijuana is what it may be mixed with prior to sale. Users may be getting more - or less - than they pay for.

Myth: It is safe to use Marijuana when driving a vehicle!

Using marijuana when driving a car increases the risk of injury. Any activity requiring concentration, good judgment, eyesight, timing, coordination or fast reactions may be potentially dangerous when high. Combining marijuana with alcohol is particularly dangerous. Marijuana's impairment on driving seems to be increased when combined with even low doses of alcohol. Some people may choose to drive because they do not feel or appear to be drunk. Driving under the influence is a serious criminal offence.

Myths & Realities



Myth: The effects of marijuana disappear two to three hours after use!

Marijuana is fat soluble and so stays in the body longer than if it were water soluble, like alcohol. Most of the marijuana high wears off 2 to 4 hours after use; however, THC and other components are converted into chemical compounds that tend to remain in the body for days. These compounds accumulate for longer periods in fatty tissue of the body's organs and can be detectable for several days to several weeks after use has stopped.

Myth: Marijuana can't be that bad because it's prescribed for sick people!

Marijuana that has been prescribed by a physician and authorized for use by Health Canada is often referred to as "medical marijuana". It is used for persons with debilitating symptoms from specific diseases such as multiple sclerosis, cancer and HIV/AIDS infections. Unlike other medications, however, Health Canada has not assessed marijuana as meeting the standards for safety and quality under the Food and Drugs Act. As with other medications, like insulin or anti-depressants, which are prescribed for particular medical conditions, having marijuana available for use under these circumstances does not mean it is safe for recreational use.

Myth: Marijuana is less harmful than tobacco and alcohol!

The effects of any drug depend on how much, where, when and how often you use. Like alcohol, marijuana can impair concentration, coordination, and judgment; and like tobacco, the smoke contains cancer-causing chemicals. But unlike alcohol and tobacco, marijuana production is not regulated, so you never know what you are consuming.