

Legalization of Cannabis

As some jurisdictions around the world have legalized cannabis, and while others discuss this possibility, it is not surprising that public perception of risks associated with use and consideration of cannabis as harmful or dangerous is decreasing (McHale, Goddard, & Vásquez, 2016). Despite this perception, research shows that there are harms associated with use, particularly for adolescents (George & Vaccarino, 2015). These harms are concerning as after alcohol, cannabis is one of the most frequently used substances among Canadian youth (Statistics Canada, 2016).

What does this mean for you and your family?

On July 1, 2018, the federal government is making changes to legalize and regulate cannabis. In response to these changes, Saskatchewan has released a [Cannabis Framework \(2018\)](#) outlining a plan for the legal and responsible distribution, sale and use of cannabis in the province.

Key details included in the [Framework](#) are:

- Minimum age for non-medicinal cannabis consumption will be 19 years of age.

- Minors (under the age of 19) are not allowed in cannabis retail stores.
- Identification is required for all retail sales and deliveries, regardless of apparent age.
- Zero tolerance for all drug-impaired drivers in the province. It will always be illegal to drive while impaired in Saskatchewan – whether by drugs or alcohol. 
- Saskatchewan is introducing legislation to prohibit the possession of any amount by a minor. Possession of more than five grams will be a criminal offence subject to the Youth Criminal Justice Act.
- The province will adopt the federal minimum standards around home production, including a limit of four plants per household.
- Consuming cannabis in public spaces will be prohibited. Consumption will also be prohibited in schools and daycares. 

Information about Cannabis

Cannabis (marijuana, pot, weed, reefer, MJ, dope or grass) comes from the plant, *Cannabis sativa*. Once grown, the leaves and flowers can be dried for use or made into oils, waxes and other products for consumption. Cannabis can be smoked in a joint, pipe or bong, or vaporized. It can also be eaten, brewed as a tea or made into skin lotions (Government of Saskatchewan, 2017).

Cannabis contains many chemical compounds. Two that receive the most attention are **THC** (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) and **CBD** (cannabidiol). THC is what makes people “high”; CBD is often used to alleviate pain and does not result in a “high”.

THC

The most researched cannabinoid is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is responsible for the way your brain and body respond to cannabis, including the high and intoxication. THC has some therapeutic effects but it also has harmful effects. Harmful effects may be greater when the strength of THC is higher.

The potency (concentration or strength) of THC in cannabis is often shown as a percentage of THC by weight (or by volume of an oil). THC

potency in dried cannabis has increased from an average of 3% in the 1980s to around 15% today. Some strains can have an average as high as 30% THC.

Cannabis that contains very low amounts of THC in its flowers and leaves (less than 0.3%) is classified as hemp.

CBD

Cannabidiol (CBD) is another cannabinoid. Unlike THC, CBD does not produce a high or intoxication. There is some evidence that CBD may block or lower some of the effects of THC on the mind. This may occur when the amount of CBD in the cannabis is the same or higher than the amount of THC. CBD is also being studied for its possible therapeutic uses.

Most cannabis products come from or can be made using the flowers and leaves of the cannabis plant. Depending on how they are made, these products can have a range of potencies of THC (and CBD).

(Government of Saskatchewan, 2017)

Cannabis and Adolescence

Research reports that fewer adolescents believe that regular cannabis use is harmful.

Research also shows the brain is not fully developed until around age 25. Adolescents are particularly at-risk for marijuana-related harms since their brains are undergoing rapid, extensive development. Chronic use might also increase the risk of psychosis, depression and anxiety, in addition to respiratory conditions and lung cancer if smoked (Canadian Center on Substance Abuse, 2015).

Effects can be experienced within seconds to minutes of smoking, vaporizing or dabbing cannabis. These effects can last up to 24 hours. If you eat or drink cannabis, the effects can occur within 30 minutes to two hours and can last up to 24 hours.

Short-term Health Effects

Cannabis affects everyone differently. After using cannabis, you might have red eyes, problems with memory and increased hunger (also known as “the munchies”) or feel sleepy. You may also become paranoid and nervous. Cannabis can affect short-term memory and your ability to concentrate. It can also increase your heart rate and decrease blood pressure.

Cannabis use can slow down your reaction time and affect your attention span. If you use cannabis, do not operate motorized

vehicles including cars, boats, off-road vehicles or snowmobiles – you could be charged for impaired driving.

Long-term Health Effects

Long-term health effects develop gradually over time with weekly or daily use. These effects appear to be worse if you start using in adolescence and if you are a frequent user over a long period of time. One may become psychologically dependent (you feel you need it) or physically dependent (your body needs it) on the drug. Long-term effects include:

- memory problems
- concentration issues
- bronchitis
- lung infections
- chronic (long-term) cough
- increased mucus buildup in the chest

Mental Health Effects

Frequent cannabis use has been associated with an increased risk of suicide, depression and anxiety disorders. For some people, using cannabis can increase the risk of developing more severe mental health issues. People could be at increased risk if they start using cannabis at a young age, use cannabis frequently (daily or almost every day) or have a personal or family history of psychosis and/or schizophrenia (Government of Saskatchewan, 2017).

It is well established that regular cannabis use is associated with experiencing psychotic

symptoms and developing schizophrenia, especially among those who have a personal or family history of psychotic disorders.

Whether drug use induces psychosis and schizophrenia, or whether these illnesses put people at risk for drug use is still unknown.

The connections between cannabis use and other mental illnesses, especially anxiety, are less clear. Some studies have found that regular cannabis use by adolescents is associated with an increased risk of depression, worsening symptoms of depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder, suicidal thoughts and attempts, eating disorders, and childhood disorders (CCSA, 2015).

Signs of Risky or Harmful Cannabis Use

- Using regularly at an early age
- Daily or near daily use
- Using during school or work
- Using as a major form of recreation
- Using to cope with negative moods
- Experiencing chronic coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing or psychotic symptoms

Note: A young person may have one or more of these signs without having a short-term or long-term problem with cannabis. However, the more signs, the higher the risk. (Heretohelp, BC).

Drug-Impaired Driving

Impaired driving is not limited to cars. Impaired driving applies to all motor vehicles, including snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles (ATV), and boats.

If you are operating or in the care and control of a car, truck, ATV, boat, aircraft, etc. (whether it is in motion or not) and a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that you have consumed drugs (including prescription drugs) or a combination of alcohol and drugs, a demand may be given to you to undertake an evaluation to ascertain if you are impaired by the drugs, or a combination of alcohol and drugs. Failure to comply with the demand will result in criminal charges which carry the same penalty as driving while impaired (RCMP, 2018).

Saliva testing is not currently available in Saskatchewan, but the new provincial legislation is preparing for the eventuality that testing will be available and police in this province will lay the new charges when appropriate (SGI, 2017).

If found to be on drugs, people will face similar consequences as they do now for driving while intoxicated. If charges are laid, a driver can have their license immediately suspended and their vehicle seized for 30-60 days. There are

also administrative charges through SGI, including a one- to five-year driving suspension, fines up to \$2,500 and requirements to complete an educational program.

Police will also have the authority to use federally-approved roadside drug screening. If you are convicted of driving under the influence, you should know that in Canada, DUI has been considered a criminal offence since 1921.

What happens if you have a DUI record?

- You may be turned away from a potential employer after failing a background check.
- You may lose your current job or not be hired for a job as the record will be part of background checks.
- You may be turned away at the US border. While a single DUI is not necessarily grounds to turn you away, multiple DUI convictions or a combination of lesser offences may make you inadmissible. You might need to attain a waiver to gain entry to the US.
- You may have difficulty getting bonded (insured) as the cost of insurance goes up if you have a criminal offence.

Community Resources and Supports

Contact your local Addictions/Mental Health Services office, doctor or other health care provider if you need more information. The following resources are also available:

- ✓ Saskatchewan [HealthLine](#)
- ✓ Saskatchewan [Alcohol and Drug Support](#)
- ✓ [Ministry of Health Fact Sheet / Cannabis](#)
- ✓ [Parents Matter: You Can Influence Your Children's Views on Alcohol and Drugs](#)
- ✓ [Talking with Teenagers About Drugs](#)
- ✓ [Talking Matters](#)
- ✓ Call Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868)
- ✓ Contact your PVSD school-based social worker
- ✓ Contact your community Elder
- ✓ Call HealthLine at 811