

# Cannabis FAQ

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## General cannabis knowledge

### What are the health effects (risks and benefits) of cannabis use?

Cannabis, like alcohol and tobacco poses a number of health risks. The risks vary according to frequency of use, what exactly is being used, how it is being used and whom is using it. Here are some links to learn more.

1. [Canada's Lower- Risk Use Guidelines](#) – are national guidelines to support lower risk use. It is important to note the lower risk guidelines are for adult populations and are aimed at non-medical cannabis use. This is a brochure created for the public.

A [summary brief](#) version of the Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guideline's for health professionals can be reviewed for further learning.

2. [Health Canada – Cannabis Health Effects](#) is publicly available resource to access information on short term effects, long term effects, and information on how cannabis affects young people's health, cannabis for medical purposes, and the risks of using cannabis when pregnant or breastfeeding.
3. [Here to Help BC](#) is a provincial resource with free to access information for individuals and families and substances and mental health related topics. Here are some cannabis education documents to support learning.
  - [Safer cannabis use – Here to Help BC](#)
  - [Cannabis use and youth – a parent's guide](#)
  - [Learn about cannabis](#)

### Are there resources for specific populations?

Some populations of people such as youth and pregnant or breastfeeding people are at increased risk to experience harms from substances.

1. Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse is another great resource for any substance related information and strategies. Here are some reports and guiding documents focused on cannabis.
  - [Clearing the Smoke on Cannabis: Maternal Cannabis Use during Pregnancy](#)
  - [Health effects on youth](#)
  - [Marijuana and Youth – Canadian Centre on Substance Use](#)
  - [The Effects of Cannabis Use during Adolescence](#)
2. Other Resources
  - A By Youth for Youth Resource called [the Blunt Truth](#) is available for free online and has many useful tips about ways lower risks if using cannabis.

## What are the therapeutic uses of cannabis?

Potential therapeutic uses of cannabis as per [The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research](#)

- In adults with chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, oral cannabinoids are effective antiemetics.
- In adults with chronic pain, patients who were treated with cannabis or cannabinoids are more likely to experience a clinically significant reduction in pain symptoms.
- In adults with multiple sclerosis (MS)-related spasticity, short-term use of oral cannabinoids improves patient-reported spasticity symptoms.
- For these conditions the effects of cannabinoids are modest; for all other conditions evaluated there is inadequate information to assess their effects.

[Cannabis for Medical Purposes Evidence Guide: Information for Pharmacists and Other Health Care Professionals](#)

## What are the health effects of CBD? Does it cause impairment?

### 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.<sup>1</sup>

Northern Health Pharmacy Cannabis Document



DRAFT Pharmacy  
Cannabis Document.d

## What risks are specific to edible forms of cannabis?

Ready-to-eat edible forms of cannabis will not be legal for sale until late 2019. However, individuals may choose process cannabis into edible forms for personal consumption. Clear labelling and secure storage are important to reduce the risk of accidental consumption. Standard food safety principles also apply (e.g. to reduce the risk of contamination with microbial pathogens).

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Canada, accessed from Health Canada Cannabis in Canada page at:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/about.html>

## Legal status changes

### **As of October 17, 2018, what is legal and what is not legal in relation to cannabis?**

On October 17, 2018, legalization will cover fresh and dried cannabis, and some kinds of cannabis oil, but not concentrates, extracts or edible products made from concentrates or extracts.

There are limitations on the amount of cannabis a person can possess, and there are limitations on where cannabis can be consumed. This is governed by provincial legislation. In BC, a person must be at least 19 years old to be able to purchase cannabis.

If we test someone's THC levels (e.g. in blood) after they have just been involved in a motor vehicle accident, will a positive test result affect their legal liability? (relevant to informed consent for the test, and considering that blood THC levels do not correlate well with objective measures of impairment)

Practitioners should order and/or perform tests and interventions that are necessary for the care they are providing. If it is clinically necessary and appropriate to order a drug test, then it should be done, just as we would do when testing blood alcohol. If the police subsequently wish to obtain those clinical results, they would have to do so with a subpoena, or with the client's consent to release that information.

### **Can the RCMP ask us to test someone's THC levels?**

As for alcohol level testing, practitioners cannot be required to perform tests for the purpose of evidence collection. Physicians may, with the consent of the patient, collect a sample at the request of police, following appropriate chain-of-evidence procedures, but they are not required to do so.

## Caring for our clients

### **How to recognize and deal with clients who are intoxicated due to cannabis?**

[Camh](#) has a great list of effects to be aware of. People can have very different experiences with cannabis. You may see people feeling relaxed, lively, talkative, giggly or even euphoric while others feel tense, anxious, fearful and confused. Consider behaviour that is outside of typical presentation and consider the following potential physical effects of cannabis.

- red eyes
- dry mouth and throat
- irritated respiratory system (from smoking)
- increases in appetite and heart rate
- decreases in blood pressure, balance and stability

- drowsiness or restlessness, depending on the amount taken and individual response to the drug. <sup>2</sup>

### **How to deal with clients using cannabis in Northern Health facilities?**

Smoking and vaping cannabis are not permitted in NH facilities under the [Smoke-Free Grounds](#) policy. For other forms of non-medical cannabis, the approach should be essentially the same as for alcohol.

### **How to assess a client's cannabis use?**

There is no one recommended assessment tool for healthcare providers. Continued use of current substance use screening practice is recommended. Important information is frequency of consumption, method of consumption, safety of substance and setting of use so we can intervene with safer substance use information. The following tools may be helpful

- [Brief Action Planning](#) – template.
- [NHA – QI-Brief Action Planning Webinar Series](#)

### **How to counsel a client regarding their cannabis use?**

Northern health supports a harm reduction approach for all people who use substances. Current information, practice support tools and links for further information can be found on [OurNH – Cannabis](#). The lower-risk use guidelines are also helpful and can be found in a evidence brief built for health care professionals as well as a brochure created for the public.

- [Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#) – for health care professionals
- [Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#) – for the general public

### **What are the risks of growing cannabis indoors/at home, and how can these be mitigated?**

The National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health provides a thorough overview of the risks and suggests some strategies for mitigating these risks in their document [Growing at Home: Health and Safety Concerns for Personal Cannabis Cultivation](#).

## **Workplace health and safety/intoxication at work**

### **What if I am inadvertently exposed to cannabis smoke while delivering services in the community (e.g. home care)?**

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<sup>2</sup> Centre for addiction and mental health website accessed here: <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/cannabis>

- Employees must follow the [Northern Health Home Visit Risk Assessment Guidelines](#) and ensure that clients are aware of the applicable language:  
*"Because of the Worker's Compensation Board's Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Northern Health has to ensure that our staff do not work in situations that put them in contact with tobacco smoke (including smoke for smudging and ceremony). Therefore, we ask smokers to not smoke inside for one hour prior to and during the visit. We realize this may seem like an imposition in your own home, however the law requires it and Northern Health would be subject to penalties for not complying."*

### **How will staff who use medically authorized cannabis be accommodated?**

- The duty to accommodate extends to disabled employees who are authorized medical cannabis. These employees are accommodated in the same way as any other disabled employee who has been prescribed medication, recognizing an authorization for medical cannabis:
  - Does not entitle an employee to be impaired at work;
  - Does not entitle an employee to smoke in the workplace;
  - Does not entitle an employee to unexcused absences;
  - Does require Northern Health to attempt to find suitable workplace accommodation.

Consideration for accommodation starts with the employee consulting with their physician and confirming with disability management an underlying medical condition requiring medically authorized cannabis.

### **How long must I wait after using Cannabis before coming to work?**

Cannabis affects each person differently. There are numerous factors that will affect a person's ability to metabolize Cannabis after it has been ingested. For that reason it is not possible to identify a specific time frame after which a person is no longer considered impaired. All employees are required to maintain compliance with the Northern Health [Substance Use by Staff Policy](#) and must only report to work if they are fit to perform the duties of their position.

### **Is smoking cannabis allowed on Northern Health grounds?**

No. Northern Health is committed to providing a health promoting environment free from the smoke and vapour of tobacco, cannabis and other combustibles on health authority grounds as detailed in the [Smoke-Free Grounds Clinical Practice Standard](#).

## **Laboratory**

### **Who will be doing the testing for impaired drivers? Will NH labs be impacted?**

Parliament has passed legislation that allows for police to conduct roadside tests for detecting the presence of drugs, including cannabis. We do not anticipate testing for impaired driving will have any impact on NH labs.

## Medical cannabis

### **What constitutes authorization for medical cannabis use? How should medical cannabis be stored? Administered?**

Cannabis for medical purposes – [Health Canada](#) information on access, authorization, regulations for licensed producers.

Cannabis (medical or non-medical) should be kept in locked cupboard or container and treated as hazardous to children and pets. For more information visit [Growing at home](#).

### **How will staff who use medically authorized cannabis be accommodated?**

Consideration for accommodation starts with the employee consulting with their physician and confirming with disability management an underlying medical condition requiring medically authorized cannabis.

Northern Health's [Medical Cannabis Policy](#) was published in August 2018.

## Population health

### **What are the expected population health impacts of legalization? Impacts on use?**

There is broad public health consensus supporting legalization and regulation of cannabis as an opportunity to reduce overall harm through a public health approach to cannabis.

We do not expect there to be an increase in substance use rates overall, but do hope there is an increase in discussion around substance use and welcome opportunity to provide/apply a harm reduction lens to support safer consumption for those who are using substances.

We anticipate cannabis will become more visible in our communities, and are committed to working with communities and all levels of government to support healthy public policy to protect all people in the north.

### **What does Northern Health recommend to local governments? What is our role w.r.t. local governments?**

Northern Health MHO's have created and sent out a letter for local governments with recommendations and opportunities to promote and protect health.



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### **What does Northern Health recommend to schools?**

A letter to support schools in promoting and protecting health during legalization is being drafted and resources to support schools can be found on OurNH – Cannabis.

### **What is Northern Health doing to educate the population about the harms of cannabis?**

Regional Leads and communications advisors have developed a series of cannabis messaging set to go out on Northern Health social media platforms in the coming weeks.

OurNH – Cannabis page is also there to support point of care staff and teams to meet the requests from the public.

There are also [provincial](#) and [federal](#) campaigns that will be supporting public knowledge.