



Cannabis

What Is It?

Cannabis is a drug that comes from the Cannabis sativa plant. It originates in Asia but now it is grown around the world, including in Canada.

Cannabis contains hundreds of chemical substances. Over 100 of these are known as cannabinoids. THC (delta9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is believed to be the main cannabinoid that causes the high and intoxication from cannabis.

Cannabis can come in many different forms. Some forms of cannabis are more concentrated and stronger than others. For example, **hash** and **kief** are physically more concentrated forms because of the part of the plant used. **Hash oil**, **shatter**, **budder**, and **wax** are chemically more concentrated forms. These forms can be more dangerous since people can use more than they expect!

Cannabis from authorized retailers in Canada is legal in Canada for both recreational and medicinal purposes. A legal cannabis product will always have certain information on its package and label – look for these features to tell if a cannabis product is legal.

WARNING: Buyer Beware! Illicit cannabis is not tested or quality controlled and may contain harmful contaminants. Reduce your risk by choosing legal cannabis!

What Does It Look Like?

Cannabis may look like:

- Fresh or dried flowers and leaves
- Powder
- Liquids/oils/sprays
- Creams/salves
- Wax
- A thin hard glass-like sheet that can “shatter” or break into smaller pieces
- Food and drinks containing cannabis extracts (“edibles”) – these can look like anything from gummies to soda



How to recognize illegal cannabis

An illegal product may:

- have a multi-colour package
- look like candy
- mimic a popular brand of candy or snack food or have a similar name
- have flashy promotions
- come in a package that isn't child-resistant or shows the product through the packaging
- missing the standardized cannabis symbol, health warning in English and French, and other features of legal cannabis
- For edibles: claim to contain more than 10 mg of THC per package, which exceeds the maximum permitted in legal edible products

How Does It Work?

Cannabis has stimulant, depressant & hallucinogen effects. It acts on the body and brain and can result in a “high” (euphoria), a sense of well-being, relaxation, and heightened senses (sight, taste, smell, sound).

Why Is It Dangerous?

Cannabis can have widespread effects on a person's life including physical, mental, and social harms.

Short-term health effects can include:

- confusion
- sleepiness (fatigue)
- memory issues
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty paying attention
- slower reaction time
- anxiety, fear or panic
- paranoia, delusions, and hallucinations
- lower heart rate
- lower blood pressure

Using cannabis in pregnancy or while breastfeeding can affect the healthy development of a baby's brain.

Longer term cannabis use can increase the risk of addiction. Early and frequent use is also known to affect the brain's development and can impact learning, memory and attention. The younger someone is when they start using cannabis and the more often they use it, the higher the possibility that they will experience harms. **Some of those harms may not be fully reversible.** Other long-term effects of smoking cannabis are like the effects of smoking tobacco – these can include bronchitis, lung infections, chronic (long-term) cough, and increased mucus buildup in the chest.



What Does Cannabis Toxicity Look Like?

A person experiencing a cannabis overdose can have nausea, vomiting, chest pain, dizziness, sleepiness, anxiety, panic attacks, and psychosis.

If you are concerned about someone who you think has been using cannabis, **call 9-1-1**. Stay with them if it is safe to do so and encourage them to eat and drink water. **If in doubt, give Naloxone**. Illicit drugs can be cut with fentanyl or carfentanil. Naloxone will not cause further harm.

The **Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act** protects you from drug possession charges when helping in an overdose situation.

Safer Use Tips

If you are using cannabis, here are some tips to decrease your risk:

- Choose legal cannabis from authorized retailers in Canada.
- **Start low and go slow.** Start with a “tester dose” and wait before taking more. **Take breaks!** Be aware that some forms of cannabis, like edibles, will take longer to feel the effect. Allow time to feel the effects before taking more.
- **Don’t drive** while under the influence of cannabis!
- **Don’t mix with other substances**, including alcohol and prescription or over the counter medications.
- Keep cannabis stored safely away from kids. If a child eats cannabis call the poison control hotline.
- Cannabis smoke contains many of the same harmful chemicals as tobacco smoke. Be mindful of those around you and keep it away from children and pregnant women.

Need Help?

Help is always available. Reach out to your local health centre, community counsellor/mental health professional, or call 8-1-1.