

Talking to kids about CANNABIS



Why are you receiving this fact sheet?

On October 17, 2018, cannabis (also known as “marijuana” or “pot”) will become available for sale, legally and for recreational purposes, across Canada. At that time, cannabis will become more available and more visible than ever before.

After October 17, kids may see more people using cannabis and the shops where cannabis is sold. This may result in them asking questions about the use and sale of cannabis.

Given the risks and harms of using or possessing cannabis, and the fact that one in ten young Canadians have used cannabis, we encourage all parents and guardians to take time to talk about cannabis with your kids. By working together, we can make sure that our kids know enough about cannabis to make safe choices when they are at home, at school or anyplace else!

Starting “the talk”

As the parent or guardian, how you choose to talk to your kids about cannabis is up to you.

Here are some general tips to consider:

- Always be open and listen to what your kids have to say.
- Avoid arguing or making judgments concerning your kid or their friends— this is very important on how successful your “talk” will be.
- Stick to the facts. When kids are faced with making a decision about whether to use cannabis or avoid it, they need the facts to help them do so.
- Help your kids to understand the facts by making time to share what is important.
- Use simple words that you and your kids understand.
- Be prepared to discover that your kids might know more about cannabis than you do! Listen with an open mind and keep calm before carrying on.



Start by letting your kids know what cannabis is and how it is used. Most teenagers may already know much about it, while younger children may not know about it at all. Kids will benefit from knowing what cannabis does and the possible risks and harms that can result from using it. Finally, they should know the laws about possessing or using cannabis in Manitoba. This fact sheet will help you to explain each of these subjects.

Always remember, if your kid asks a question about cannabis and you don't know the answer, find the right answer together. Learning together creates a safer place where your kids can come to you to talk about cannabis and other drugs, knowing they can get the answers they need to the toughest questions.

Messages that teens want to hear about cannabis?

MSBA and MAPC asked a group of high school graduates to review this fact sheet, including the questions and the content. While this information may not work for everyone, we agreed that these were important questions, answers and facts to share with kids. We also agreed on the following:

- Start by asking your teenager what they know. That will help you as their parent or guardian to understand what facts they know, or don't know, as you enter into conversation.
- Be prepared to discover that they might know more than you thought they did and do not to become angry or disapproving when you discover how much they do know!
- Stay away from debates on subjects that form part of the talk. It is more important for teens to receive some of this message, than to spend time on the parts which may create arguments.
- Arguing may cause your teen to "tune out"—and stop listening. They may have difficulty remaining focused on what you have to say or share.

There are some topics that kids may find doubtful or even disbelieve. Originally, we talked to our teens about the dangers, risks and harms of using cannabis on physical (bodily) health. We also talked about possibilities that cannabis users may overdose or become addicted. While these may also seem to be very relevant subjects to talk about, some teens may strongly challenge and expressed significant doubts about all three subjects.

This is perhaps best explained because most teens have not experienced these effects of cannabis and may not know anyone who has. By talking about the dangers, risks and harms of bodily health, overdose and addictions, it may appear that you are using these topics to try to scare your teen into believing what you have to say. They may not believe what you have to share or they may even feel that you are trying to control what they do. Here again, the result may be that your teen "tunes out"—they may stop listening or may no longer remain focused on what you have to say or share.

What facts should I share with my kids?

The questions below will give you some tips to help you start to talk to your kids about cannabis. Asking them about what they already may help to give ideas about what where to start or when you may need to find more information.

1. What is cannabis?

Cannabis comes from a plant. There are two different types of plant, the *cannabis sativa* or the *cannabis indica* plant. The leaves and buds of these plants, and products made from them, can be inhaled (breathed through the mouth and into the lungs), consumed (eaten or drank), or absorbed (through the skin) into the human body. When this happens, two chemicals called CBD (cannabidiol) and THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) will cause the brain to act and react differently than it normally would.



2. How is cannabis used?

There are many ways that someone can use cannabis:

- It can be smoked (like tobacco), where the leaves are rolled up into a small sheet of paper (like a cigarette) or they can be placed into a pipe and then lit with fire. Rolled cannabis is often called a “joint”, a “roach” or a “blunt”. Cannabis smoke has a distinct odour when used in this way.
- The buds and leaves of the cannabis plant can also be heated to cause the oils in the plant to release vapours or fumes. These vapours and fumes are then inhaled by the user. Cannabis used in this way is often placed into a glass or metal container (a “bong”) but can also be placed into a small device that heats the leaves and buds (a “vaporizer” or a “vape”).
- Oil, resin or residue, or parts (leaves and buds) from the cannabis plant can also be used to make things that can be eaten or that can be put into a drink (“edible products”) like cookies, brownies, candies (like gummies or lollipops), or teas. Cannabis products used in this way are often “baked” or “brewed” together with other ingredients and these can be eaten or drunk.
- Oils and resins (residues) from the cannabis plant can also be used to make other oils, creams and lotions that can be rubbed directly onto the skin (topical application).
- People who use cannabis for medical reasons can also have THC or CBD, the plant’s two main chemical ingredients, given to them in pills, or as oils, creams or lotions by their doctor, like any other medicine.
- A form of cannabis called shatter contains higher amounts of THC and CBD than normal cannabis leaves and buds. Shatter does not look like natural leaves or buds. It can be used several different ways: smoked, eaten or drunk, or applied to the skin.

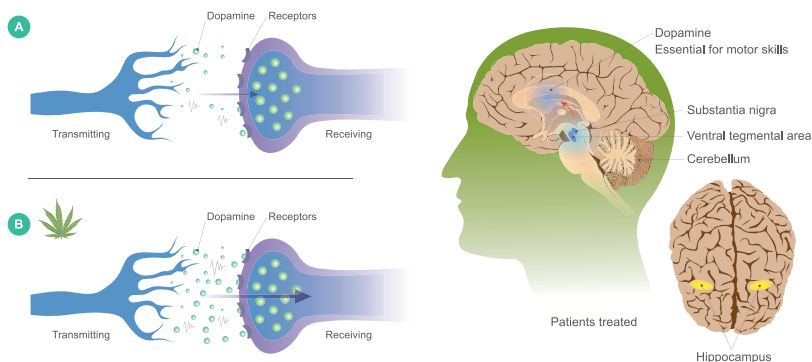


What happens when someone uses cannabis?

No matter how cannabis is used the same thing happens to the human brain: the two main chemicals in cannabis, THC and/or CBD will cause the brain to make more of its own natural chemical, called dopamine. Dopamine is a chemical that every brain makes and is needed for every person to stay healthy and strong. When THC and/or CBD come into contact with the brain, more dopamine is made by the brain than it would normally produce.

Having more dopamine in your brain does not however, mean that you will become stronger or healthier. Different people will experience what happens next, in many different ways.

- For people who use cannabis as a medicine, it can help to reduce pain, suffering, muscle stiffness, loss of appetite and nausea. It may also help some people to feel less depressed or anxious. Medical doctors therefore can and often do give cannabis to help people who suffer from several illnesses.¹



¹Most frequently, these include anxiety, depression, cancer, Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV), seizures (like epilepsy), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and multiple-sclerosis.

- Whether it is used for medical or non-medical reasons, people who use cannabis will often experience a side effect from THC that is called a “high”— these people may feel pleasure or even feel that they are happier or care-free. For some people, using cannabis can relax their body and their mind and they may even become drowsy or sleepy.
- Other people who use cannabis may experience other side effects from THC. These people may feel fearful or worried and even panic. For others, they may become agitated and unsettled or upset.

Reactions are usually not immediate and will vary from person to person, especially in consideration of the amount of THC and CBD in the cannabis that is used. The side effects from edible cannabis can also be delayed, the person who is eating or drinking it may not feel immediate side effects and thus may tend to consume greater levels of the drug.

Your kid may also know someone (maybe even a classmate) who uses medical cannabis. It is important for them to understand that when doctors give cannabis as medicine to kids, most often this will be a pill with CBD only, the less harmful of the two chemicals that come from cannabis. THC is rarely given as medicine to kids, so kids who take medical marijuana very rarely experience the above side effects.

4. What are the dangers, harms or risks of using cannabis?

There are many possible, dangers, risks and harms to people who use cannabis, as well as those around them.

Social dangers, harms and risks

- Many kids who use cannabis often cannot focus during classroom time and as a result, school results and grades do suffer. Operating tools and other equipment while in shops class, when being high, is also dangerous.
- All schools in Manitoba now have zero tolerance when it comes to having or using cannabis for non-medical purposes in school or on school property. Zero tolerance means that the school can decide not to give you a second chance if you are caught using or carrying cannabis (which also applies to alcohol and vapes).
- If a student has or uses cannabis in or on school property, this can result in them not being allowed to come to school for a period of time (a suspension) or permanently (an expulsion).
- Many schools also have “scent-free” policies. If kids smoke cannabis off school property and return to school smelling like cannabis smoke, they can be asked to leave or even be suspended.
- Kids who want to seek part-time jobs should know that many workplaces also have policies against using cannabis while on the job.
- Kids who are or hope to become involved in sports or athletics should also be aware that testing may occur when they are playing sports. Even if they have not used cannabis themselves, kids who may have inhaled (breathed) cannabis smoke second-hand can still test positive on such tests. This may lead to disqualification during a competition and suspension or removal from a team or sporting event.
- Kids also need to be aware that possession or use of cannabis for non-medical purposes by those under the legal age is against the law across Canada. There are many consequences and punishments under these laws.
- Lastly, getting cannabis is not free of charge. Cannabis always costs money and can be very expensive, taking money away from other things.



Health dangers, harms and risks

No matter how cannabis is used, once CBD and THC (the two main chemical ingredients in cannabis) enter the bloodstream, they will always eventually make their way into the brain. Due to their effects, there will always be more danger, risk and harm to a person than if they had not used it.

- Drowsiness and sleepiness are common side effects. Maintaining attention, focus and concentration when using cannabis can be a challenge.
- Some people may have difficulty or trouble remembering things or events while they are under the influence of this drug. As a result, you may do something you would not normally do, and you may even do things that are not safe. Someone may do something to you that you would not normally let them do.
- Cannabis users may find it more difficult to make decisions while cannabis remains in their body.
- Reacting and responding to events, especially quickly, can be a significant challenge. This is why doing certain activities, particularly driving or being a passenger in a vehicle where the driver has recently used cannabis, is especially dangerous. Operating heavy equipment or machinery is also very dangerous and unsafe.
- People who use different strains of cannabis (where more concentrated THC may be present) or large amounts of cannabis might even have difficulty knowing what is real and what is not real (they may have hallucinations and delusions).
- One of the most serious dangers, risks and harms to the brain may be that the person who uses cannabis develops a long term mental illness, such as psychosis and schizophrenia. People who have these illnesses find it difficult to know what is real and what is not real (they have hallucinations and delusions). Because of the effects of THC and CBD, the brain can get used to having more dopamine or it may not know how much dopamine is needed to stay healthy and strong. The risk is greatest for kids with family members who may already have such illnesses. While it is possible to get better once these illnesses start, there is no cure. These illnesses will exist for the rest of your life.²
- Kids should also know that not all cannabis will be legally sold across Canada after October 17. People who continue to illegally sell cannabis may add or mix other, even more harmful drugs into the leaves, buds or resins (residues). This is why cannabis is often known as the “gateway drug”: cannabis can be used by illegal cannabis dealers to get kids to experience or become addicted to other serious and dangerous drugs, without them even knowing that they are using these other drugs.

5. How much cannabis can I use before I “become high”? How much is safe to use?

Everyone will experience cannabis in a different way. It all depends on the size, weight, age and existing medical conditions of every person. It also depends on the concentration levels of THC and CBD in what is used. When the brain starts reacting to THC, the most common side effect is often called becoming “high”. How much cannabis is needed to produce “a high” depends on each individual. When the “high” happens also depends on how cannabis is used: smoking or vaping cannabis will sometimes result in an immediate “high”, while eating, drinking or applying cannabis to the skin may take a longer time before the user experiences a “high”. Someone who eats or drinks cannabis may use much more than they should have, because they did not know the significant side effects that would occur later.

In the end, perhaps the only “safe” way to use cannabis is if it is given to you by a medical doctor. Doctors know how much cannabis to give to each person who needs it, and can provide directions on how to safely use it.

In this respect, it is important to talk to your kids about the difference between so-called “recreational” cannabis use and “medicinal” cannabis. Use of the term “recreational” to describe non-medical use of cannabis can be very misleading: kids may think that using cannabis is just as “recreational” as playing sports or having fun with their friends. The truth is that while cannabis is now legal, it still comes with many dangers, risks and harms.

²For more information, please visit the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre in New South Wales, Australia for an overview that is easy to understand: <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/blog/does-cannabis-cause-mental-illness>

Kids also need to know that just because cannabis might be given to an adult member of their family as medicine by a doctor, does not mean that it is safe for them to use. Across Canada, some kids unfortunately try prescription medications given to their parents when the parents are not home. This is not safe to do at any time, no matter what medicine it might be.

Lastly, kids need to know that no amount of cannabis is safe when it comes to driving a vehicle, or being a passenger in a vehicle that is driven by someone who has recently used cannabis. For this reason, police across Manitoba have adopted a zero tolerance approach to driving while under the influence of cannabis.

If any amount of cannabis is suspected or detected on a driver, it will result in an immediate suspension of that person's driver's license. This is because driving after having used cannabis is not only dangerous to the driver and their passengers but to others who share the road with them. Every year in Manitoba, many vehicle accidents are because drivers decide to get behind the steering wheel after using drugs (like cannabis) and alcohol.

Making sure you and your kids know about cannabis laws

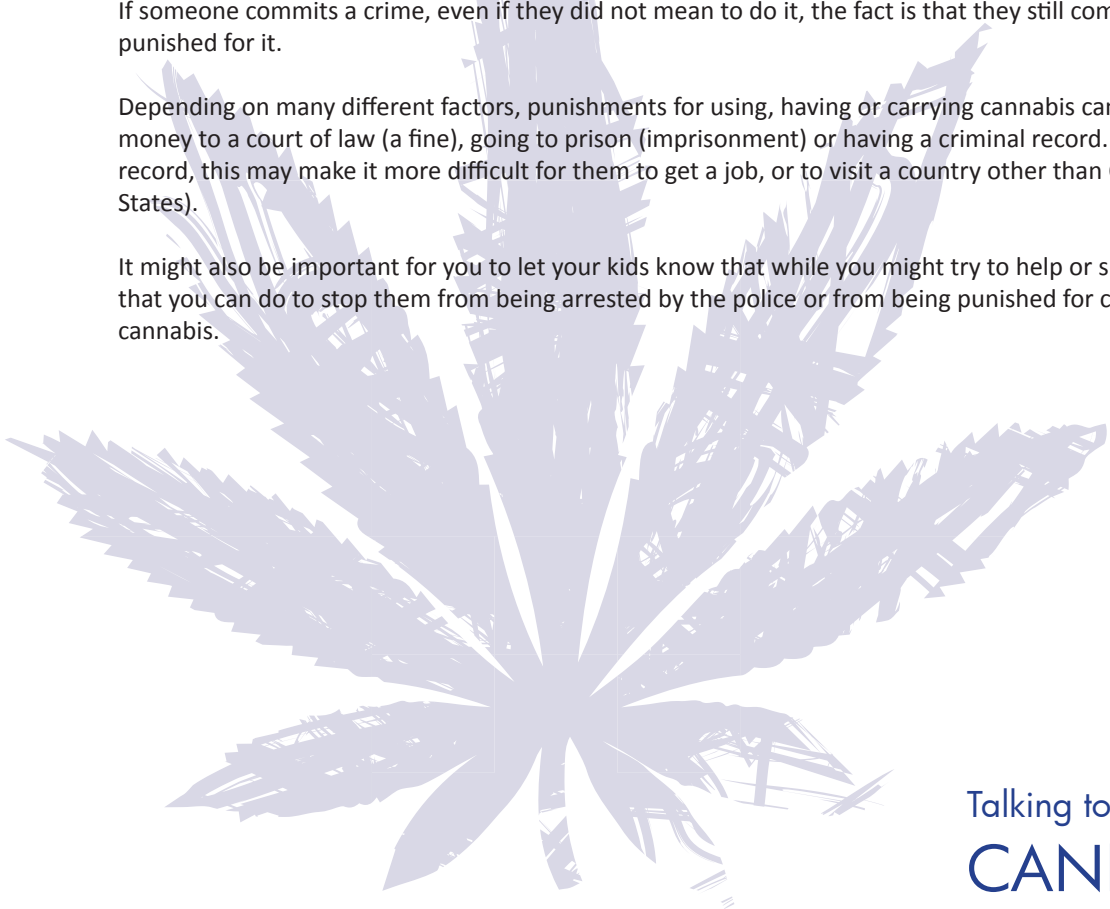
The reality is that in Canada, there are now more laws than ever before against kids (minors) using or having cannabis *unless it is for medical purposes*. By "having" cannabis, what we mean is that a young person has or carries cannabis on them. The actual legal term is to "possess" or to "have possession" of cannabis. It is against the law for a kid (under the age of 19 years in Manitoba) to use, have or carry cannabis *for non-medical purposes*.

It is also important that kids in Manitoba be aware that unlike alcohol and tobacco, which they can legally buy when they turn 18 years of age, people in Manitoba cannot buy, use or have cannabis below the age of 19.

Not knowing about a law does not mean that it does not apply to you. It is also an important fact that using cannabis does not provide an excuse for what someone might do during or after they have used it. If someone commits a crime, even if they did not mean to do it, the fact is that they still committed the crime and may be punished for it.

Depending on many different factors, punishments for using, having or carrying cannabis can result in the need to pay money to a court of law (a fine), going to prison (imprisonment) or having a criminal record. If someone has a criminal record, this may make it more difficult for them to get a job, or to visit a country other than Canada (including the United States).

It might also be important for you to let your kids know that while you might try to help or support them, there is nothing that you can do to stop them from being arrested by the police or from being punished for committing a crime that involves cannabis.



In general, you and your kids should know that it is against the law in Manitoba:

- For a youth (under 19 years of age) to have or use cannabis (the legal term for this is to “possess or consume”).
- For a youth to grow or pick cannabis plants, leaves or buds (the legal term for this is to “cultivate, propagate or harvest”).
For an adult (19 years of age or older in Manitoba) to give, sell or supply cannabis to a young person.
- For an adult (19 years of age or older in Manitoba) to give, sell or supply cannabis to a young person.
- For an adult to get a young person to commit a cannabis-related crime.
- To sell a cannabis accessory (like rolling papers, a pipe, bong or vaporizer) to a youth.
- For a youth to enter a cannabis store or shop.
- To make or provide a young person with a fake or false identification (ID) so that they can buy or get cannabis.
- For anyone to drive or operate a vehicle (on land, on water or in the air) while using or having recently used cannabis. This includes cars, trucks, boats, sea-doods, ski-doods, all-terrain vehicles or ATVs, tractors and farm equipment, and aircraft. Punishments are even more severe for those who drive or operate a vehicle where youth may be passengers.
- For anyone to drive or operate a vehicle with openly accessible cannabis. What this means is that cannabis must be transported in the trunk of a vehicle. If the vehicle does not have a trunk, then cannabis must be kept behind the very last seat of the vehicle.
- For anyone who has recently used cannabis to supervise novice drivers under the Graduated Driver’s License program.
- For anyone to use cannabis in a public place. This includes outdoor places such as a sidewalk, street, highway or outdoor parking lot, a park, playground or beach, an outdoor pool, splash pad or water park, a playing field or other outdoor sports location, an outdoor entertainment location, the grounds of school, university or college, and an outdoor patio or deck that is associated with a restaurant or that may be an enclosed public place.

It is also important for you and your kids to know that the legal age to have or use cannabis is different in each province of Canada. Cannabis purchased in Canada also cannot be taken across many borders into other countries, including the United States.

Other laws may exist in addition to those that have been included in this fact sheet. Anyone who is interested in learning more about cannabis laws should visit the websites of the Government of Canada, the Government of Manitoba, as well as the website for the province that they wish to visit. Punishments for cannabis crimes are described in the laws and regulations that these Governments have established.

To learn more about cannabis:

Health Canada: Talking with Teenagers About Drugs website:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/talking-about-drugs/talking-with-teenagers-about-drugs.html>

Teen Mental Health Website (includes outstanding resources for kids and parents):

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/cannabis/>

Drugs Free Kids Canada General Information on Cannabis:

<https://www.drugfreekidscanada.org/prevention/drug-info/cannabis/>

Drugs Free Kids Canada “Talk Kit” for Parents and Guardians:

<https://www.drugfreekidscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/34-17-1850-Cannabis-Talk-Kit-EN-10.pdf>

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction Marijuana Webpage:

<http://www.ccdus.ca/Eng/topics/Marijuana/Pages/default.aspx>

Manitoba Public Insurance “Driving High” Campaign Information

<https://www.mpi.mb.ca/en/Rd-Safety/Impaired/Drugs/Pages/drugs.aspx>

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba– “Cannabis Information Resources” webpage:

<https://makeconnections.ca/links/cannabis-information-resources/>

Manitoba Health, Healthy Living and Seniors “Talking to Youth About Cannabis” webpage:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/cannabis/youth.html>

