



# cannabis

## and the Law



### Help & Information

Help and advice about cannabis in NSW is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from **The Alcohol and Drug Information Service**. ADIS provides counselling, advice and referral services. You don't have to give your name, and anything you say is confidential. **This service is not connected to the NSW Police.**

### ADIS Numbers

**Sydney metropolitan areas:**  
**9361-8000**

**Country areas (free call):**  
**1-800-422-599**

Phone numbers for other drug and alcohol services and Community Health Centres in your area can be found in the index of the White Pages and your local telephone directory.

### In trouble with the law?

**Law Access NSW (Freecall): 1300 88 85 29**

**Legal Aid Hotline for under 18s (Freecall): 1800 10 18 10**

**Aboriginal Legal Service: 02 9318 2122**

### 'Street' names for Cannabis:

marijuana, dope, pot, grass, weed, head, mary jane, doobie, bud, ganja, hashish, hash, bhang.

People affected by cannabis are "high", "stoned", "out of it", "whacked", "off their face".

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## Cannabis and The Law

You are breaking the law if you possess, use, grow, import or sell cannabis (marijuana), cannabis resin (hash) or hash oil. In NSW, if you are found guilty of possessing or using cannabis, you could get a fine of up to \$2,200, and/or other penalties including community service work or a term in prison of up to 2 years. These penalties apply to both adults and young people aged between 10 and 18 years.

For growing, importing or selling cannabis, the penalties are more severe. The severity of the penalty depends on the amount of cannabis, if it was being sold, and if you have prior convictions.

You may get a **criminal record** if you are found guilty of possessing, selling or growing cannabis. This makes it hard to get a job, a credit card, or a visa to travel to other countries.

## Cannabis Cautioning Scheme

On 3 April 2000, the NSW Government introduced the Cannabis Cautioning Scheme. Under this scheme, police can issue a caution to adults in possession of up to 15g of cannabis leaf (about enough for 15-25 joints). A Caution provides a warning of the health and legal consequences of using cannabis and information on where to seek treatment.

This scheme does not mean that cannabis is now legal or decriminalised. Rather that police have the discretion to issue a caution for small amounts of cannabis. At all times police retain the option of charging people for these offences.

Under this scheme a person can receive the benefit of only two cautions.

## Young Offenders Act 1997 – Drug Amendments

Changes to the *Young Offenders Act* allow police to divert young people aged between 10 and 18 years from the courts for minor drug offences. As a consequence, possession of a small quantity of cannabis leaf for personal use can now be dealt with by way of a formal warning, caution or youth justice conference. Decisions made by the police in relation to the Act will depend on the young person, their criminal record and the seriousness of the offence.

## What about driving?

It is against the law and dangerous to drive a car or operate machinery under the influence of cannabis or other drugs. Even low doses of cannabis can affect your concentration, coordination and reflexes, and your ability to make sensible decisions. Cannabis also makes you tired and sleepy.

Police have the power to detain drivers suspected of being under the influence of drugs and have them blood and/or urine tested at a hospital. If you drive under the influence of drugs you could lose your licence, get a fine or go to prison.

## What is Cannabis?

Cannabis is the common name for the dried leaves and flowers of the plant *Cannabis sativa*. Cannabis is usually smoked in cigarettes ("joints") or water pipes ("bongs") mixed with tobacco. Cannabis can also be baked in cakes or biscuits.

Hash and hash oil are derived from the resin of the cannabis plant. Hash is a highly concentrated form of cannabis resin, and is usually sold in small brown blocks. Hash oil is a sticky black liquid. Both hash and hash oil are stronger than cannabis.

## What does it do?

Cannabis can make you feel happy and relaxed. It can increase your sense of taste, smell and hearing, making you talk louder and laugh more than normal, and increase your desire for food ("the munchies").

The chemical in cannabis that produces the "high" is called **THC** (tetrahydrocannabinol). The strength of cannabis depends on the level of THC.

Effects can begin immediately, depending on the strength and how much you take. If smoked the biggest effect is in the first 20 minutes and can last for 1-2 hours. If eaten, the biggest effect occurs around 60 minutes later and can last up to 4 hours.

## Effects of cannabis use:

- red and watery eyes
- racing heart beat
- coughing
- asthma and breathing problems
- dry mouth
- upset stomach
- short-term memory loss
- loss of coordination
- anxiety or paranoia (thinking that people are talking about you or are trying to hurt you)
- hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not real) – after large doses.

## What about long-term or heavy use?

If you use cannabis on a regular basis, you may find it hard to stop. Long-term or heavy use can make you confused, do silly things or become hard to get along with and slower to react. Using cannabis can reduce your performance at work or school and your memory. Long-term smoking of cannabis (or anything else) will cause damage to your throat and lungs.

## Can I reduce the risks?

The more serious physical and mental health problems result from heavy and regular use of cannabis. Such problems can be reduced if cannabis is used less, or not at all.

## What if I mix cannabis with alcohol or other drugs?

Taking cannabis with alcohol or other drugs increases the risk of serious health effects. The effects of cannabis can be more harmful if mixed with alcohol or any drug that slows down the brain, such as heroin, sedatives, anti-depressants and anti-histamines. Smoking cannabis mixed with tobacco increases your risk of respiratory disease such as lung cancer.

## What if I use cannabis while I'm pregnant?

Smoking any substance during pregnancy is not recommended. Mothers who smoke cannabis tend to have babies born with lower than normal birth weight, which increases the risk of other health problems. If you need more information ADIS (see back) can put you into contact with a drugs and pregnancy specialist.

