

Impact of Legalization of Cannabis at Work

October 2018

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The use of recreational cannabis will become legal in Nova Scotia on October 17, 2018.

These Frequently-Asked-Questions are intended to help employees understand the impact of legalization of cannabis for them in their schools and other work sites.

Cannabis and Its Effects

What is cannabis?

Cannabis (often called marijuana) comes from the cannabis plant. It contains the active ingredient delta-9 Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and is a depressant drug that reduces brain activity.

How does cannabis make a person impaired?

Cannabis can impact behavior and the capacity to perform jobs/tasks safely. Being impaired at work can affect your ability to focus, make decisions, follow instructions and handle equipment and tools.

The effects of cannabis on the body can include the following:

- dizziness, drowsiness, fatigue, headache
- impaired memory and disturbances in attention, concentration and ability to think and make decisions
- disorientation, confusion, feeling drunk, feeling abnormal or having abnormal thoughts, feelings of unreality, feeling an extreme slowing of time
- impairment of motor skills and perception

The effects and length of impairment can differ from person to person, and depends on several other variables, including how the cannabis was consumed (e.g., inhaled, eaten, etc.), and the amount of THC content in the cannabis. (** Sources: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS); Health Canada)

If you choose to use cannabis, it is your responsibility to understand the impact it has on you, and to ensure that you do not attend work under the influence or impaired.

Recreational Cannabis

What is recreational cannabis use?

Cannabis use that is not for medical purposes.

In the same way that you cannot drink, share, sell or be under the influence of alcohol at work, you cannot ingest, share, sell or be under the influence of recreational cannabis while on school grounds, other work sites or during regional or school-sanctioned activities.

Does the legalization of cannabis give employees the right to use cannabis while at work or to be impaired at work?

No. Current policies and expectations remain in place with respect to the expectation for all employees to report to work fit for duty, to remain fit for duty, to safely and productively do their jobs.

Why is the use of recreational cannabis prohibited at work, even though it is legal?

Like alcohol impairment, cannabis impairment is a health and safety concern in the workplace because it can impact your ability to perform physical and mental tasks. This can put you and others at risk.

Can I consume cannabis recreationally before work, or on one of my breaks?

Employees are expected to refrain from use of any substances (including cannabis) which may adversely affect their ability to safely and productively perform their job duties. The impact and lasting effects of cannabis are still not well understood. When and how you feel the effects and how long they last, can vary depending on how you ingest cannabis. If you smoke or inhale cannabis, the effects can be felt almost immediately. If you consume cannabis as a food or beverage, the effects may be more delayed and can last longer.

If you choose to use cannabis, it is your responsibility to understand the impact it has on you, and to ensure that you do not attend work under the influence or impaired. Failure to do so could result in disciplinary action.

Will staff be able to vape or smoke cannabis?

No one is permitted to smoke or vape on school grounds or other work sites.

I am a recreational user. Do I have to tell my employer?

Using recreational cannabis when an employee is not working does not require him/her to report it. However, the legalization of cannabis does not give employees the right to use cannabis in the workplace or come to work impaired.

All employees are expected to come to work fit for duty and able to perform their duties in a safe and effective manner. Disclosure may become necessary if an incident occurs or if there is a reasonable suspicion of impairment and there is a resulting investigation.

How many hours before reporting to work can I consume cannabis?

The duration or extent of the impact that cannabis has on an individual varies. Employees must refrain from using cannabis or any other substance in a manner that affects their ability to safely and productively perform their job duties and provide an orderly and safe learning and working environment.

How long before I can drive if I have consumed cannabis?

The duration or extent of the impact that cannabis has on an individual varies. Driving while impaired is against the law in Canada. No employee or volunteer will transport a student or students, while under the influence of cannabis, whether prescribed medically or obtained for recreational use.

Can I have cannabis in my possession at work?

No. The use, possession, sale, or distribution of recreational cannabis in any form is banned for employees while on school grounds, other work sites or during regional or school sanctioned activities.

What should I do if I suspect a coworker is impaired?

Document your observations and facts and share immediately with your administrator or supervisor who will report the matter to the Human Resources Department for follow-up. Employees who are reasonably suspected of being impaired should be removed from the workplace immediately.

Medical Use of Cannabis

What is cannabis use for medical purposes?

This is when a physician has authorized the use of cannabis for a medical reason

Will the legalization of recreational cannabis change access to the use of cannabis for medical purposes?

No. Health Canada will continue to regulate medical cannabis.

Do I have to disclose to my employer if I use cannabis for medical purposes?

Use of cannabis involves the same principles of accommodation as any other physician prescribed drug, and is therefore treated like any other prescription medication. Should you have any specific questions, contact your human resource department.

Questions?

Who Do I Contact if I Have Questions?

Nova Scotia has a comprehensive website on cannabis <https://www.novascotia.ca/cannabis/>

Additional questions regarding the use of cannabis in the workplace can be directed to hrhelp@hrce.ca.

Any employee who feels their cannabis use may be negatively impacting their lives is urged to contact their Employee and Family Assistance Program and/or your benefits provider for support.