

Alcohol & Cannabis 4

Parent summary

Alcohol & Cannabis: Lesson 4

The short-term consequences

Like many other substances, cannabis use produces a period of acute intoxication which includes a range of psychological and physical changes in the body. In general, the acute effects of cannabis become evident within a few minutes of smoking it (or 1-2 hours after ingesting it). The effects last for about 4 to 6 hours. The short term effects of cannabis vary from person to person and can be pleasant or unpleasant.

Physical health effects

- Dry mouth.
- Sleepiness.
- Increased heart rate.
- Feeling hungry (“the munchies”).
- Poor coordination (affecting the ability to perform complex tasks such as playing sport or operating machinery).
- Red or bloodshot eyes.
- Vomiting.

Mental health effects

- A feeling of well-being, euphoria and relaxation.
- Talking and laughing more than usual.
- Altered sense of time and heightened sensory perception.
- Feeling anxious (nervous, worried or paranoid).
- Panic attacks.
- Decreased inhibitions (doing or saying things you would not normally). This can lead to engaging in risky behaviour such as unsafe sex or dangerous driving.
- Confusion.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Hallucinations after large doses.

Preliminary first aid for cannabis use

Sometimes when a person uses cannabis they may “green out”, which involves feeling anxious and nauseous after using cannabis. Below are some suggestions to help someone who is “greening out”:

- Don't leave them alone.
- Reassure them that the feelings will pass and that it is just the drug effects.
- Place the person in a comfortable position.
- Place a cool cloth to their forehead and the back of the neck.
- Call for help if you think it is necessary.

The legal status of cannabis

In Australia, the possession, use and supply of cannabis is **illegal** under Commonwealth cannabis laws. Each State and Territory in Australia has its own legislation for dealing with cannabis-related offences. Some jurisdictions enforce criminal penalties for use, possession and supply (NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, WA and QLD). Criminal penalties are those that follow conviction in criminal proceedings. Others have civil penalties for minor cannabis offences (SA, NT, and ACT). Civil penalties do not result in a criminal record.

As of 2020, the ACT is the only state in Australia to have legalised cannabis possession, use and cultivation for personal use under specific circumstances...however, this conflicts with Commonwealth cannabis laws and causes much confusion around its permissibility.

In addition to legal consequences, young people found with cannabis may be punished by their parents or school e.g. the school may contact their parents, or refer them to attend counselling as a condition of return to school.

Useful Resources

This reference list is provided as a good source of information for parents who may be interested in

reading further.

For information about Australian drug laws:

Australian Government Department of Health (2019). Drug laws in Australia.

<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/drugs/about-drugs/drug-laws-in-australia>

For information about the specific conditions outlining personal use of cannabis in the ACT:

ACT Government. Cannabis.

<https://www.act.gov.au/cannabis/home>

For information about decriminalising vs legalising drugs in Australia:

Alcohol and Drug Foundation (2019). Decriminalisation in detail.

<https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/law/decriminalisation/decriminalisation-detail/>

Alcohol and Drug Foundation (2019). Position Paper: Drug Law reform/Decriminalisation.

https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/ADF_PositionPaper_druglawreform.pdf

For information about cannabis and how to talk to young people that may be using cannabis:

National Institute on Drug Abuse (2020). Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know.

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/marijuana-facts-parents-need-to-know/talking-to-your-kids-communicating-risks>

Alcohol and Drug Foundation. Talking to young people.

<https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/parenting/talking-young-people/>

For information about the risks and harms associated with cannabis use:

Greydanus, D. E., Hawver, E. K., Greydanus, M. M., & Merrick, J. (2013). Marijuana: current concepts†. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 1.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3859982/pdf/fpubh-01-00042.pdf>

Fischer, B., Russell, C., Sabioni, P., van den Brink, W., Le Foll, B., Hall, W., . . . Room, R. (2017). Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines: A Comprehensive Update of Evidence and Recommendations. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(8), e1-e12.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5508136/pdf/AJPH.2017.303818.pdf>

Weiss, S. R. B., Howlett, K. D., & Baler, R. D. (2017). Building smart cannabis policy from the science up. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 42, 39-49.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5404989/pdf/nihms851090.pdf>

MacDonald, K., & Pappas, K. (2016). WHY NOT POT?: A Review of the Brain-based Risks of Cannabis. *Innovations of Clinical Neuroscience*, 13(3-4), 13-22.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4911936/pdf/icns_13_3-4_13.pdf

For information about drugs and alcohol, how teachers can help their students avoid alcohol- and drug-related harms and school-based education programs:

Positive Choices. Drug and Alcohol Education: Teacher Booklet.

<https://positivechoices.org.au/teachers/drug-education-teacher-booklet>

Alcohol Drug Information Service (webchat and helpline):

<https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/getting-help/Pages/adis.aspx>

