



GET THE FACTS: CANNABIS

Cannabis (or marijuana) is the most commonly used illicit drug in Australia.¹ In 2007 It was used by an estimated 4% of the global adult population (166 million people).²

Cannabis use was banned in most developed countries under international drug control treaties but its recreational use among adolescents and young adults became a cause for concern in the late 1970's when many young people were arrested for possession and use.²

Cannabis is often seen as a 'softer' drug than drugs like cocaine and heroin because the risk of overdose is low. However, there is a growing evidence that cannabis use is related to a variety of possible harms, including mental health disorders. Like any drug, heavy use of cannabis can have negative effects on physical and mental health. Its possession, use or sale of cannabis has legal consequences. Get the facts below.

The consequences: The law

The use, cultivation and possession of cannabis are illegal all over Australia – but penalties vary from state to state.

NSW residents caught with up to 15 grams of cannabis may be cautioned – after two cautions charges will be laid.

ACT residents caught with up to 25 grams of marijuana are fined \$100, or can choose to attend a treatment program instead of paying the fine.

SA residents found with up to 100g of marijuana, 20g of hash (resin) or one non-hydroponic plant are fined \$50 to \$150.

VIC residents caught for possession of less than 50g of cannabis can either be charged or referred to an education program.

TAS offenders found with up to 50g can be cautioned three times in ten years, with different procedures at the time of each caution.

NT adults found in possession of up to 50g of marijuana are likely to be fined \$200, and risk a criminal charge for non-payment

WA residents who have no previous cannabis offences caught with no more than 10g of cannabis must attend a cannabis intervention session or received a conviction. All cannabis cultivation (planting, etc.) offences attract a criminal conviction

QLD residents caught with up to 50g of cannabis must first be offered a drug diversion program, including mandatory assessment and a brief intervention. Only one offer of diversion is allowed per person.³



Image: Getty

The consequences: Your health

Adverse effects of acute use:

- Driving while intoxicated doubles the risk of being in a car crash
- Women who use cannabis during pregnancy have babies with a reduced birthweight
- Some users have very unpleasant psychological experiences, such as heightened anxiety and psychotic symptoms

Adverse effects of chronic use:

- Regular use from adolescence has been associated with the risk of developing a dependence syndrome
- Regular use in adolescence and young adulthood double their risks of experiencing psychotic symptoms and disorders
- Regular adolescent cannabis users have lower educational attainment

Physical health outcomes

- Regular cannabis smokers have higher risks of developing chronic bronchitis
- Cannabis smoking by middle-aged adults probably increases the risks of myocardial infarction
- The effects of cannabis use on respiratory cancers remain unclear because it is difficult to disentangle the effects of cannabis and tobacco smoking⁴

References:

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Detailed Findings*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2008.

² Room, R., et al. *Cannabis policy: moving beyond stalemate*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

³ SBS. *Factbox: Cannabis Laws in Australia*. 2015. <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2012/04/03/factbox-cannabis-laws-australia>

⁴ Hall, W. "What has research over the past two decades revealed about the adverse health effects of recreational cannabis use?" *Addiction* 110.1 (2015): 19-35.