Cannabis and Driving

Cannabis and the Law

- It is illegal to drive impaired, regardless of the source of impairment.\(^1\)

- The federal government has passed new legislation, the *Impaired Driving Act*, which introduces three new offences for driving under the influence of drugs and establishes legal limits for blood delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) limits. Individuals are prohibited from driving within two hours of being over the legal limits.\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>Blood THC Level</th>
<th>Federal Penalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Driving under the influence of cannabis</td>
<td>2ng* or more but less than 5ng of THC per 1ml* of blood</td>
<td>Maximum $1,000 fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Driving under the influence of cannabis</td>
<td>5ng or more of THC per 1ml of blood</td>
<td>Mandatory minimum $1,000 fine – 120 days imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Driving under the influence of cannabis combined with alcohol</td>
<td>50mg* of alcohol per 100 ml blood and 2.5ng or more of THC per 1ml of blood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ng = nanogram  *ml = millilitre  *mg = milligram

- The updated law also authorizes police forces to use an approved roadside saliva test if there is reasonable suspicion that a driver is under the influence of drugs. The saliva test kit can detect the presence of both THC and cocaine.

- Police officers with grounds to believe a drug impaired driving offence was committed may demand a blood sample to determine the driver's blood THC (or other drug) levels.

- Young (21 and under), novice (G1, G2, M1, M2), and commercial drivers are subject to a zero-tolerance policy. If a roadside saliva test detects the presence of THC, they may face immediate consequences including license suspensions.

- All drivers who are found to be impaired may face immediate penalties such as licence suspensions, vehicle impoundments, and monetary penalties. If convicted in court, the driver may face fines or jail time.

Considerations for Medical Cannabis Users

- It is illegal to drive when impaired by cannabis regardless of whether the driver is authorized to use it for medical purposes. It remains the individual's responsibility to ensure that they are not impaired while driving.

- Individuals will not be subject to Ontario's zero tolerance drug requirements for young, novice, and commercial drivers if a police officer is satisfied that they are legally authorized to use cannabis for medical purposes.

Physician Responsibilities

- According to the CPSO's *Cannabis for Medical Purposes* policy statement, physicians must warn patients that they may become impaired while using cannabis for medical purposes.\(^3\)

- The CMA's *Driver's Guide* (9th Edition), suggests that physicians recommend a minimum amount of time to wait before driving after cannabis use (either medical or recreational).\(^4\)

- Physicians are also reminded of their responsibility to report to the Ministry of Transportation when a patient is unfit to drive. This includes when a patient has or appears to have a diagnosis of an uncontrolled substance use disorder (excluding caffeine and nicotine) and is non-compliant with treatment recommendations.\(^1\)
Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and Cannabidiol (CBD) are two of the main components of the cannabis plant.

- THC is the primary psychoactive compound in cannabis. It is responsible for both the “high” and the impairments associated with cannabis use.13
- CBD, which is commonly isolated for therapeutic uses, does not produce psychoactive or intoxicating effects.14
- The effects of each individual cannabis product may depend on the specific THC-to-CBD ratio.14 It remains unclear as to whether the presence of CBD can diminish or exacerbate the effects of THC.15,16

Cannabis Consumption and Driving: How Long to Wait?

- There is no definitive evidence for a one-size fits all recommendation for a safe amount of time to wait before driving after consuming cannabis.
- Impairment levels can vary greatly across individuals and circumstance based on a range of factors including:5, 11, 18
  - time since consumption
  - THC levels in the cannabis product consumed
  - delivery method (smoked, ingested, nasobuccal, topical, etc.)
  - personal use patterns (frequency of use, deep inhalation or breath-holding of smoked cannabis, etc.)
  - individual metabolism of THC
- Effects of impairment, including attention, concentration, and decision-making deficits, can last up to 24 hours, and even longer for those who consume cannabis frequently (five or more times per week).7,8,19,20
### Medical Cannabis: Preliminary Guidance

- Preliminary guidance published in 2014, including the CFPC’s *Authorizing Dried Cannabis for Chronic Pain or Anxiety*\(^{21}\), and Kahan *et al*'s *Prescribing Smoked Cannabis for Chronic Noncancer Pain*\(^{22}\), cite Level II evidence\(^{11}\) to suggest that physicians instruct patients who are consuming cannabis for medical purposes to refrain from driving for:
  - 4 (four) hours after inhalation
  - 6 (six) hours after oral ingestion
  - 8 (eight) hours or more after inhalation or oral ingestion
    if the patient experiences a psychoactive high

- The wait times above are largely based on a review that differentiates the medical cannabis user from the recreational user. Patients prescribed cannabis for medical purposes are instructed to consume individualized doses of cannabis to achieve symptom relief rather than to achieve a subjective high.\(^{11}\)

### Recreational Cannabis: Recent Guidance

- Recent guidelines published in anticipation of recreational cannabis legalization, including Fischer *et al*'s widely endorsed *Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines*, instruct individuals who consume cannabis to **wait** before driving for:
  - at least 6 (six) hours.

- This wait time may need to be longer, depending on the user and the product consumed.\(^{23}\)
2. Bill C-46, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (offences relating to conveyances) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, 1st Sess, 42nd Leg, Canada, 2018.