

# MEDICAL PHARMACIES DRUG NEWS

Drug Information and News for Health Care Providers

May 2017

## Medical Marijuana (Cannabis) Update

Under **current** Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations (ACMPR), although marijuana/cannabis is not an approved therapeutic drug in Canada, individuals who have a medical document from a doctor or nurse practitioner can purchase marijuana from a licensed supplier and use it for medical reasons.

## What can medical marijuana be used for?

Marijuana is comprised of cannabinoids, including tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD), that cause physiologic effects. Euphoria is generally caused by THC, while medicinal properties are more likely to be related to CBD. Some of the more common uses include:

Multiple sclerosis

Chronic pain

Reducing side effects of cancer chemotherapy

## How is medical marijuana used?

Marijuana can be consumed orally (e.g., in oils or foods) or by inhalation (vaporizing or smoking). Smoking marijuana poses similar risks to residents as smoking tobacco and is not recommended.

## Prescription Cannabinoids

Some prescription medications contain synthetic forms or extracts of THC, CBD, or other cannabinoids. They are referred to as cannabinoid medications. These products vary in their onset and duration of action.

- Nabilone (Cesamet®) – oral capsule, works in 60 to 90 minutes, lasting 8 to 12 hours
- THC/CBD (Sativex®) – buccal spray, works in 15 to 40 minutes, lasting 2 to 4 hours

### References:

- Health Canada. Information for Health Care Professionals. Cannabis and the cannabinoids. 2013. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/marihuana/med/infoprof-eng.php>. Accessed April 5, 2017.
- Government of Canada. Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations (ACMPR) April 1, 2017.



## How soon are the effects of medical marijuana felt, and how long do they last?

This depends on the product and how it is consumed.



## What types of side effects can residents experience?

Dizziness, disorientation – risk of falls

Dry mouth, nausea, increased appetite

Chest pain, rapid heart rate

The side effects can be worsened if marijuana is taken with other medications that cause similar effects (e.g., antidepressants, anticholinergics, sedatives).