



Is marijuana illegal?

Yes, marijuana is illegal. Marijuana is a Schedule I substance under the Controlled Substances Act. Schedule I drugs, which include heroin and LSD, have a high potential for abuse and serve no legitimate medical purpose in the United States.

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Photo of marijuana leaf © Artville

Marijuana Fast Facts



Questions and Answers



National Drug Intelligence Center
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What is marijuana?

Marijuana is the mind-altering substance produced from a plant with the scientific name *Cannabis sativa*. The drug is used because its primary active chemical, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), may induce relaxation and heighten the senses.

What does it look like?

Marijuana generally refers to the dried, shredded leaves, stems, seeds, and flowers of the cannabis plant. This mixture typically is green, brown, or gray in color and may resemble tobacco. While lower quality marijuana usually includes all parts of the cannabis plant, higher quality marijuana often is composed only of the buds and flowering top of the plant.

How is it used?

Users typically smoke marijuana as a cigarette, known as a joint, or in a pipe or bong. The drug also is smoked using blunts—cigars that have been hollowed out and refilled with marijuana, sometimes in combination with other drugs such as crack cocaine. Marijuana also has been mixed with foods or brewed as a tea.

Who uses the drug?

Individuals of all ages use marijuana—data reported in the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse indicate that 37 percent of U.S. residents aged 12 and older used marijuana at least once in their lifetime. The survey also revealed that a significant percentage of teenagers and young adults use marijuana—20 percent of individuals aged 12 to 17 and 50 percent of individuals aged 18 to 25 used the drug at least once.

Marijuana use among high school students is a particular problem. Nearly half (48%) of high school seniors in the United States used the drug at least once in their lifetime, and 22 percent used the drug in the past month, according to the University of Michigan’s Monitoring the Future Survey.

What are the risks?

Even at lower doses marijuana impairs attention and coordination and affects the way the mind processes information. Because of these effects marijuana use has contributed to automobile, household, and occupational accidents, resulting in harm to the user and to others. High doses of marijuana may result in image distortion, loss of personal identity, and hallucinations.

The abuse of marijuana also can cause serious physical and mental problems including frequent respiratory infections, impaired memory and learning ability, increased heart rate, anxiety, and panic attacks. Individuals who regularly abuse the drug may experience the same problems as tobacco smokers including cough, phlegm, chronic bronchitis, and frequent chest colds. In addition, because marijuana contains toxins and carcinogens marijuana smokers increase their risk of cancer of the head, neck, lungs, and respiratory tract.

What is it called?

There are hundreds of slang, or street, terms for marijuana, and both the terms and their meanings can vary from one part of the country to another. The most common names for marijuana are grass, pot, and weed. (Please see the Street Terms text box below for additional names.)

Street Terms for Marijuana	
420	Hydro
Acapulco gold	Indo
BC bud	KGB (killer green bud)
Buddha	Kindbud
Cheeba	Locoweed
Chronic	Mary Jane
Dope	Shake
Ganja	Sinsemilla
Green goddess	Skunk
Herb	Wacky tabacky
Homegrown	