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FROM:
Jessica Hopkins, MD, MHS, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

Key Messages
- Recreational cannabis becomes legal on October 17, 2018 and is subject to federal and provincial laws and regulations.
- Cannabis use is associated with short and long-term health risks.
- Some populations are at higher risk for cannabis related adverse effects.
- There are recommendations to lower the risks associated with cannabis use.
- Various resources for information and referral are available to support physician practice.

What you need to know about cannabis legalization
- On October 17, 2018 cannabis will be legalized across Canada.
- In Ontario, the minimum legal age to consume and buy cannabis is 19 years old.
- Cannabis will initially be available only through online purchase at the Ontario Cannabis Store. A private retail model is expected by April 1, 2019.
- Public possession will be up to 30 grams of dried cannabis or its equivalent. Smoking recreational cannabis will be permitted where tobacco consumption is permitted under the Smoke Free Ontario Act. Home growing will be limited to up to 4 plants per household.
- The legal framework for medical cannabis will remain as a separate system.

Cannabis use in Peel
- Approximately 8% of residents (aged 12 years and older) have used cannabis at least once in the past 12 months³

Health impacts of cannabis use
- Cannabis use has both immediate and long-term health risks. Overall, evidence indicates that frequency and intensity (e.g., daily or near-daily) are some of the strongest and most consistent predictors of severe and/or long-term cannabis-related health problems.³
- Main risks include:
  - Short term effects: problems with thinking, memory or physical co-ordination; hallucinations or impaired perception; fatal and non-fatal injuries, including those from impaired driving³
  - Long-term effects: mental health problems, addiction and dependence; chronic pulmonary/bronchial problems; reproductive problems³

The proportion of the population who reported using cannabis in the past 12 months is significantly higher among males compared to females and those ages 19 to 29³
- 16% of students in grades 7-12 report using cannabis in the past 12 months²
- Students in grades 9-12 who are past year users of cannabis report that²:
  - They are worried about their use of cannabis (23%)
  - The idea of missing smoking cannabis makes them anxious or worried (20%)
  - They wish they could stop using cannabis (16%)
At-risk populations

- Some populations are at higher risk for cannabis related adverse effects and should refrain from using cannabis. This includes:
  - individuals with predisposition for, or a first-degree family history of, psychosis and substance use disorders; and
  - pregnant women.
- For youth, the later cannabis use is initiated the lower the risks.³

Recommendations from Canada’s Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines

1. Cannabis use has health risks best avoided by abstaining
2. Delay taking up cannabis use until later in life
3. Identify and choose lower-risk cannabis products
4. Don’t use synthetic cannabinoids
5. Avoid smoking burnt cannabis – choose safer ways of using
6. If you smoke cannabis, avoid harmful smoking practices
7. Limit and reduce how often you use cannabis
8. Don’t use and drive, or operate other machinery
9. Avoid cannabis use altogether if you are at risk for mental health problems or are pregnant
10. Avoid combining these risks

Resources

- Canada’s Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines
- CAGE-AID Screening Tool
- Canadian Association of Public Health - Cannabis Screening Tools
- Cannabis Talk Kit – Know How to Talk with Your Teen
- Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction – Marijuana

Referring patients

- ConnexOntario – Drug and Alcohol Helpline provides 24/7 free and confidential health services information for people experiencing problems with alcohol, drugs, mental health or gambling. 1-866-531-2600.
- Peel Addiction Assessment and Referral Centre – Provides comprehensive assessments, treatment planning, case management, referrals, education, and individual and group counselling, 905-629-1007.
- Rapid Access Addiction Clinic – Provides immediate access to lifesaving treatment by offering same-day counselling and addiction medication through collaboration with primary care, the emergency departments (William Osler Brampton, Etobicoke sites), shelters and other health service providers and first responders. 905-451-2123 or 1-877-451-2123.
- Central West Health Line – Offered by the Central West Local Health Integration Network (CW LHIN), the website provides easy access to a variety of assessment resources, referral and treatment services for people with additions. 905-769-0040 ext. 7888.
- One-Link – A single point of access for referrals to 10 addiction and mental health service providers funded by the Mississauga Halton Local Health Integration Network. 1-844-216-7411 or 905-338-4123.

References