



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Cannabis and COVID-19

During crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals may face challenges impacting their regular pattern of cannabis consumption. When using cannabis it's important to take appropriate precautions in order to reduce the spread of the virus.

This document will outline some of the recommended ways of consuming cannabis during a pandemic, in order to reduce the spread of the virus. It will also cover how to support clients who might go through withdrawal symptoms due to a possible change in accessibility.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CLIENTS TO CONSUME CANNABIS RESPONSIBLY DURING A PANDEMIC BY SHARING THE FOLLOWING HARM REDUCTION PRACTICES

Avoid sharing joints, vapes, pipes or bongs.

- It's reported that COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets released when you cough, sneeze or speak.
- It can also be spread by touching surfaces like glasses or counter tops, and also through joints, vapes, pipes and bongs.

It is recommended that an individual prepares their own cannabis for consumption, however, some harm reduction measures to consider when an individual is unable to prepare their own:

Preparing pre-rolled joints for others.

- Wash your hands well with soap and water. If soap and water are not available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. [6]
- Wear a mask (medical grade or homemade). More about safely using facemasks and how to make your own [here](#).
- Instead of licking the joint to seal it, use a sponge and water.
- If you have access to plastic bags, consider putting joints in to reduce handling.

For further reading, some helpful tips can be found here:

<https://towardtheheart.com/resource/hr-supply-outreach/open>

Receiving pre-rolled joints.

- Try to maintain physical distancing during exchange.
- Wash hands before and after smoking.

If you plan to smoke or vape

- Be mindful that smoking and vaping present different risks.
- Try to reduce cannabis smoking or vaping when possible.
- If you are sick, avoid smoking or vaping cannabis.
- Try using another method of consumption, for example edibles or tinctures, as these do not impact the lungs.
- Avoid taking deep inhalations and try not to hold your breath. [6]
- Use products that have no more than 100 mg/g (10%) THC content. [6]
- It has been reported that COVID-19 causes infections in the nose, throat and lungs, issues that can be exacerbated by smoking and vaping.
 - People who smoke or vape seem to be at higher risk of developing severe symptoms of COVID-19 infection. [6]

NOTE: research is still ongoing on the long-term impacts smoking and vaping have on people who develop COVID-19. [4]

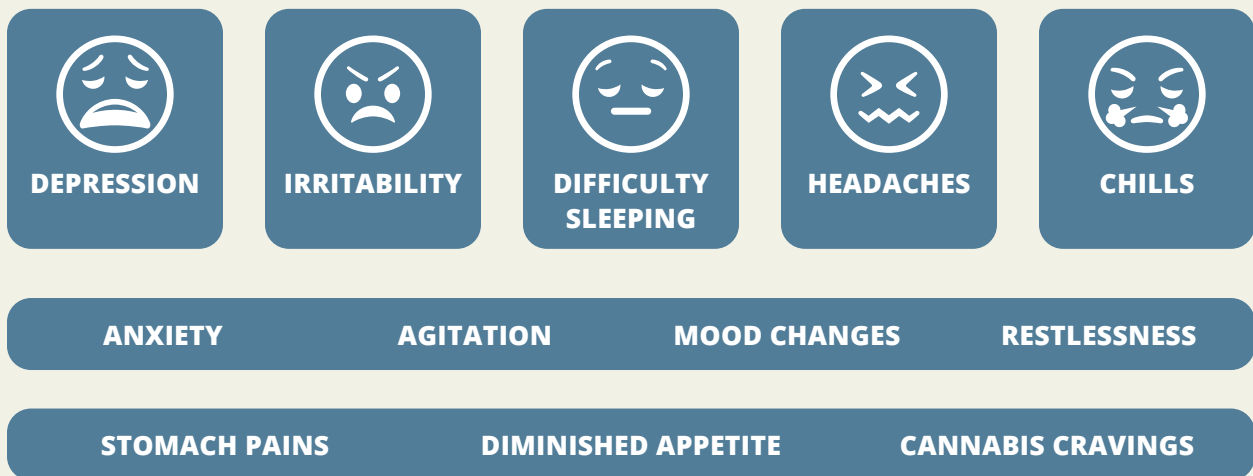
Order online.

- Where possible, order your cannabis online for delivery or pick-up at your local cannabis dispensary.

HOW TO SUPPORT CLIENTS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS DUE TO A LIMITED SUPPLY

When someone has to stop using a substance, like cannabis, due to a limited supply, their body may react to this lack of substance. This response is generally called withdrawal. Withdrawal is a natural part of detox, which in this case is the body's process in removing cannabis. [7]

Withdrawal symptoms include:



These symptoms can range from mild to more severe, and they vary from person to person. Withdrawal symptoms appear in up to one-third of regular users (users consuming cannabis once or twice monthly, [5]) and between 50-95% in heavy users (users consuming cannabis daily. [5]) [2]

CAUSES

During unexpected disruptions to services, individuals may find that they have limited access to cannabis and can start developing withdrawal symptoms.

The withdrawal process from cannabis is not considered to be life threatening, however, as with all substances, it is recommended to stop using cannabis under the supervision of a health care provider, especially for those who have consumed large quantities and at higher dosages over a long period of time (5+ years), as withdrawal symptoms may be more severe. The body becomes used to the regular supply of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). When THC is consumed regularly, your brain develops a tolerance for it. When stopped, the body has to adjust to not having it. [1, 8]

CANNABIS WITHDRAWAL TIMELINE

DAY 1-2

Symptoms associated with cannabis withdrawal appear within the first couple of days following discontinuation.

DAYS 2-6

Typically, the peak of withdrawal. Cravings can be strong; relapse is most likely.

DAYS 7-14

Most symptoms disappear within one to two weeks. However, during this time depression symptoms have been noted, as the brain chemistry changes and adapts to functioning without THC.

DAYS 15+

Most if not all symptoms disappear by week 3. Those with severe psychological addictions have reported feelings of depression and anxiety for several months after discontinuing the use of cannabis.

Content adapted from Health Care Professionals: Cannabis and the cannabinoids [2] and What to expect from Marijuana Withdrawal. [1]

TREATMENT

There have been several studies done on the effect of medications on cannabis withdrawal. These medications are either CB receptor agonists that directly suppress the withdrawal symptoms or are intended to directly treat the symptoms of cannabis withdrawal (e.g., dysphoric mood, irritability, insomnia, anxiety). [3]

There are no approved pharmacotherapies for managing cannabis withdrawal symptoms at this moment. [2]

Help managing withdrawal symptoms:

As there are no medications approved to specifically manage cannabis withdrawal it is usually treated with behavioral therapies and coping strategies. [1]

Depending on the severity of the withdrawal symptoms, the list below may help any client going through withdrawal:

- Staying hydrated with water. Caffeinated drinks may make the symptoms worse.
- Avoid eating sugar and junk food as these can exacerbate the symptoms.
- Management of sleep difficulties. Sleep disturbance can last for a few weeks, where possible, encourage the client to consider healthy sleep hygiene options, an example could be some natural remedies like chamomile tea or melatonin.
- Exercise regularly to help combat symptoms. [1]

Where possible, provide outpatient treatment options, which can be in the form of individual and group therapies to help manage symptoms and increase motivation to abstain from using. [1]

For further reading on clinical studies completed on effectiveness of some medication and treatment approaches, please refer to Pharmacological Treatment of Cannabis Dependence:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3171994/>

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

BC Centre for Disease Control COVID-19

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) have developed a list of resources:

[COVID-19 and Cannabis Smoking and Vaping: Four Things You Should Know](#)

[COVID-19 and Cannabis: How to Reduce Your Risk](#)

[COVID-19 and Cannabis: Four Things You Should Know](#)

Full list of CCSA resources can be found in CCSA's new [online resource centre](#).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

What to expect from Marijuana Withdrawal

<https://www.healthline.com/health/marijuana-withdrawal> [1]

Information for Health Care Professionals: Cannabis and the cannabinoids

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/information-medical-practitioners/information-health-care-professionals-cannabis-cannabinoids-eng.pdf> [3]

Pharmacological Treatment of Cannabis Dependence

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3171994/> [4]

What is sleep hygiene?

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>

COVID-19 – Smoking and Vaping: What's the Risk?

<https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/covid-19-smoking-and-vaping-whats-the-risk> [4]

Laboratory verification of “heavy” and “light” users of cannabis

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0376871680901921> [5]

COVID-19 and Cannabis. How to reduce your risk

<https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2020-04/CCSA-COVID-19-and-Cannabis-Reduce-Risks-Infographics-2020-en.pdf> [6]

The cannabis withdrawal syndrome: current insights

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5414724/> [7]

Update of cannabis and its medical use

https://www.who.int/medicines/access/controlled-substances/6_2_cannabis_update.pdf [8]