

# Key Information Sheet - Cannabis

## Cannabis

There is a great deal of controversy about the use of cannabis and students are influenced by what they see and read in the media. It is a fact that while cannabis will not "fry your brains," there are causes for concerns about its use, particularly as it relates to developing bodies and minds. Research indicates that there are short-term and long-term negative side effects.

Cannabis is the name that covers marijuana, hashish and hash oil – all of them come from cannabis sativa, a plant that grows in many parts of the world. All three drugs contain THC, the active chemical that changes the way you think act and feel. Cannabis is more powerful today than it was twenty years ago because growers have developed strains that contain much more THC than before

Cannabis is the most commonly used illegal mood-altering drug in North America. In 1989, an estimated 2.1 million Canadians (18 and older) used it at least once during the past year. Cannabis is an illegal drug, and possession is still considered a criminal offense.

### Short-Term Effects of Use:

- Cannabis impairs the central nervous system, much in the way alcohol does (e.g., affects vision, impairs judgment, reduces reaction time).
- Affects the respiratory system and delivers more tar to the lungs than cigarettes do.
- People find it more difficult to concentrate and learn new facts.
- We are not clear about all the effects of cannabis, but because a young person's body is growing and developing. The impact of use on a young person could be much more serious than on an adult.

### Long-Term Effects of Use:

- Psychological dependence can occur, with some people experiencing physical withdrawal if they stop using. There is evidence that THC the active ingredient in cannabis may be physically addictive.
- Accumulation in the fatty tissues around vital organs (e.g., reproductive organs, brain).
- May cause hallucinations.

- If using regularly, a person may decide to sell some of his or her personal amount, in order to be able to buy more. This is considered trafficking and is a criminal offense.
- If using regularly, a young person's circle of friends may change, and he or she may move towards a group that uses regularly.
- Research continues to examine the effects of regular use of cannabis, over the long-term, as it relates to memory and to emotional/ behavioural aspects.

Marijuana also has some medicinal uses, such as reducing nausea for people undergoing chemotherapy. We will know more about this in the next few years, but in the meantime, it is important to acknowledge that people use all kinds of drugs to feel good, either to enhance pleasure or relieve pain. This is why they continue to use these drugs. It is the negative side effects which cause concern, particularly for young people for whom the side effects could be enhanced because of their size, body weight and cell distribution.

It is very important that students get accurate information. They may be acquainted with someone who smokes cannabis and will know if the information is a “Scare Tactic” and not the truth.

If student ask about drug names that you do not know, be aware that this is very common, since new drugs and street names for drugs are developing all the time. To clarify information and to answer questions about drug use and abuse, teachers and students can get in touch with the local Health Unit or call the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (1-800-661-1111)