

Medicinal Cannabis & Driving

What is cannabis?

Cannabis comes from the cannabis sativa plant and contains more than 100 chemical substances known as cannabinoids, which act on cell receptors in the brain and body.

Medicinal cannabis and its components

Medicinal cannabis is an umbrella term that describes many cannabis-based products used therapeutically to achieve a curative or remedial effect. In most cases, medicinal cannabis requires approval from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to be prescribed. The two main cannabinoids which have therapeutic benefits are:

Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) → The primary psychoactive component of cannabis, responsible for many of the effects of recreational cannabis use. Behavioural and psychological effects of THC include euphoria, sedation/relaxation, and disinhibition.



Cannabidiol (CBD) (non-psychoactive) → A non-psychoactive component of cannabis. Behavioural and psychological effects include anxiety reduction and deep relaxation.



In Australia, the three major types of medicinal cannabis prescribed are: mainly CBD, mainly THC, and CBD & THC combined.



Compared to cannabis sourced by an individual (i.e., from a friend or dealer), medicinal cannabis is tightly regulated, meaning there is greater transparency on the origin and quality of the substance.



Did you know?

The impairing effects of cannabis are amplified when consumed with alcohol or other central nervous system depressants.

How do I know if I have THC in my system?

Random roadside drug testing by police can detect THC in your body through a saliva test. Even if you are not impaired, you can still test positive for THC for a long time. Studies have shown that THC can be detected in saliva for up to 12 to 30 hours, in urine for 10-30 days or longer, and a hair sample test for up to 90 days. There is no definite duration for how long THC stays in your system, and this depends on numerous different factors.



Does medicinal cannabis use impair driving?

There is currently insufficient evidence to determine the effects of medicinal cannabis on driving. The majority of evidence on the impact of cannabis on driving has been conducted in the context of recreational use with healthy volunteers or users, as opposed to patient populations who utilise medicinal cannabis products therapeutically.

Recent meta-analytical data suggests that cannabis-positive drivers are between 1.1-1.4 times more likely to be involved in a crash than sober drivers, similar to the crash risk associated with low-dose alcohol (BAC; 0.01-0.05 g/L). However, research is equivocal, with some studies finding no increases in crash or culpability risk with cannabis use.



Studies using driving simulators have demonstrated the extent of cannabis-induced increase in 'lane weaving' in a dose-dependent manner. While some studies have reported a decrease in speed and an increase in headway (the distance between one's car and the car in front) as effects of cannabis, these findings have not been consistent across all studies.

These risks are associated with THC, which affects parts of the brain that regulate movement, coordination, learning, memory, and higher-level cognitive functions.



Evidence to date indicates that CBD-only medicinal cannabis preparations do not impose a traffic safety risk.

Is it illegal to drive while taking medicinal cannabis in Australia?

Current rules related to cannabis driving laws can be found on your state government's website. Laws can vary by state or territory.

In all states, driving while impaired by any substance is illegal.

In many states, driving with any THC in your system is illegal. You can legally drive while taking cannabis products containing only CBD, as long as you're not impaired.

It is important to speak with a doctor and understand the laws in your specific location before driving while using medicinal cannabis.



Stay informed: The landscape surrounding medicinal cannabis in Australia is evolving fast.

- The TGA has approved more than 300,000 applications for medicinal cannabis products; this number will likely continue to increase with their decision to allow certain low-dose CBD products for purchase without a prescription.
- In 2020 a Victorian parliamentary bill was proposed for medicinal cannabis patients with a prescription of THC to be allowed to drive legally if not impaired. At present, the bill is being debated.