

Medical Cannabis (Medical Marijuana)

What is Medical Cannabis?

Medical cannabis, also known as medical marijuana, refers to the use of the cannabis plant or its extracts to treat symptoms of illness. Medical cannabis does NOT cure cancer. However, two compounds found in cannabis, THC and CBD (tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol), may help relieve many symptoms related to cancer and treatment, including pain, nausea, poor appetite, insomnia, and muscle spasms. Research for new applications for medical cannabis is ongoing. **The use of medical cannabis may disqualify you from participating in some clinical trials.**

The Process

- 1. Get certified:** Contact your health care provider to see if you may benefit from the use of medical cannabis. Practitioners can certify patients for medical cannabis for any condition, based on the practitioner's clinical discretion. Based on your medical history, you may be certified for any product, or oral (non-smoked) products only. You will receive a printed certification that you need to keep and bring with you to the dispensary to obtain the product. If you are unable to go and purchase product yourself, you may add a caregiver to your certification who can purchase medical cannabis on your behalf. You can log on to the Office of Cannabis Management online webpage at: <https://cannabis.ny.gov/patients>, "Add a Caregiver"
- 2. Purchase medical cannabis:** Visit a registered organization's medical cannabis dispensing facility to purchase product (<https://cannabis.ny.gov/dispensing-facilities>). Bring your certification form and your registry ID card (or temporary registry ID card). You will work with a pharmacist at your dispensary to adjust dosages and ratios to best suit your needs.
- 3. Monitoring:** The prescribing clinic will require a toxicology screen (urine test) before you begin using medical cannabis. Cannabis is a controlled substance, and your use of this drug will be monitored. It is expected you will obtain the drug from a dispensary. This will be verified by the certifying provider on the NYS Prescription Monitoring Program website.



Side Effects

- Like any drug, medical cannabis may have side effects. These can include increased heart rate, sedation, dizziness, confusion, hallucinations, difficulty thinking, memory trouble, and mood changes.
- Higher THC (more than 10mg) leads to more risk of cognitive impairment. It is ideal to start with a lower dose of THC when first starting cannabis, such as 2.5mg-5mg and use 1:1 or 2:1 ratios of THC:CBD to start.

- It is best not to combine cannabis with other sedating medications or alcohol and wait until you see how cannabis affects your body and mental status before operating heavy machinery or driving a vehicle.
- Cannabis should be avoided while pregnant. Long term risks are higher for children whose brains are still developing.
- Inhaled (smoked or vaped) cannabis carries an increased risk of cardiac events as well as an increased risk of fungal or bacterial pneumonia, particularly in immunocompromised patients.

Forms of Medical Cannabis Available in NY

Registered organizations may only manufacture cannabis products in forms approved by the NY Office of Cannabis Management. There are several products available, each with various benefits and drawbacks. The specific product may vary between dispensaries. Some examples:

- Vape cartridge/pen – takes effect quickly, but effect may be short-lived. Has risk of “vape illness” which is a lung infection from bacteria that may form in the cartridge. This form should be avoided in those with immunocompromised status.
- Oral products: capsules, tablets, tinctures, oils, lozenges, oral spray, oral powder, gummies – takes effect more slowly, but effect may last longer.
- Topical creams
- Metered ground plant preparation or “whole flower” cannabis for vaporization. Inhaled cannabis may cause fungal pneumonia in those with immunocompromised status and should be avoided.

Cost and Insurance

- At this time, medical cannabis is not covered by insurance. A bill to mandate medical marijuana insurance coverage was passed by the New York State Senate in June 2022 but is not yet law.
- Medical cannabis can range in cost from \$80-\$130 for once-daily use, and more expensive if used more often. You may want to start with a 5-day supply (instead of a 30-day supply) to see how effective it is for you. Unused product cannot be returned to a dispensary.

At the federal level, cannabis remains a Schedule 1 controlled substance and is not yet federally legal. Cannabis may not be carried across state lines.

More Information

NYS Medical Marijuana Program: <https://cannabis.ny.gov/medical-cannabis>

Information and registration for patients and caregivers; locations of dispensaries.

Frequently Asked Questions about the NY Medical Cannabis Program: <https://cannabis.ny.gov/medical-cannabis-program-faqs>

National Institute on Drug Abuse: www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana-medicine

Cannabis Research Report: Is marijuana safe and effective as medicine? (Revised 7/2020)



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Our program staff includes a highly trained team of nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and more.