

Health Reports: What has changed since cannabis was legalized?

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Slightly more Canadian adults used cannabis in the first full year after legalization than before legalization. From 2018 to 2019, rates of cannabis use increased from 15% to 17%. Where Canadians obtain cannabis continued to evolve over the same period: more Canadians reported using legal sources, fewer used illegal sources, and fewer obtained cannabis from friends and family.

These findings are from a new study, released today in *Health Reports*. The study combines seven quarters of the National Cannabis Survey (NCS) into pre- and post-legalization periods to more fully examine changes in Canadians' use of cannabis and related behaviours since its legalization in October 2018.

For the first time—using NCS data—it was possible to compare several cannabis behaviours at the provincial level measured before and after legalization. For example, from 2018 to 2019, cannabis use increased in four provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador (17% to 21%), Nova Scotia (21% to 26%), New Brunswick (15% to 20%) and Alberta (16% to 19%).

In addition, in all provinces, the number of cannabis users who reported obtaining at least some cannabis from legal sources also increased from 2018 to 2019. In seven provinces, fewer users reported having obtained cannabis illegally. For example, prior to legalization, 23% reported some use of legal cannabis (some of whom used for medical reasons). This proportion of users varied by province, ranging from 8% in Quebec to 36% in Alberta. After legalization, 52% of users reported obtaining at least some of their cannabis from legal sources. This proportion ranged from 37% in British Columbia to 72% in Prince Edward Island. By contrast, the proportion of consumers who reported obtaining cannabis from an illegal source also declined, but to a lesser extent, from about 50% to 40% overall. Because consumers can obtain cannabis from multiple sources, the data presented in this release cannot be used to assess the respective market shares of illegal and legal cannabis.

From 2018 to 2019, the prevalence of driving within two hours of cannabis consumption was stable (13%), while riding in a vehicle with a driver who had used cannabis decreased slightly from 5% to 4%.

Given that it has only been one year since the non-medical use of cannabis by adults was legalized, it is too soon to know whether the short-term changes observed are permanent or temporary. These changes could be related to curiosity, shifting social acceptance or an increased willingness to report cannabis use now that it is legal.

This report is part of an ongoing series of products released by Statistics Canada related to the economic, social and health aspects of cannabis, providing information on consumption, prices and cannabis-related offences. An accompanying infographic "[Cannabis legalization: What has changed?](#)" is also available. All information products released to date by Statistics Canada can be found on the Cannabis Stats Hub.

Note to readers

The Cannabis Act (Bill C-45) became law on October 17, 2018. As a result, Statistics Canada adapted the national statistical system to measure the social and economic impacts of legalized cannabis.

This study uses data from seven National Cannabis Surveys (NCS) collected every three months during 2018 and 2019. Data were combined into two groups—pre- and post-legalization—to examine changes in cannabis use (overall, daily or almost daily use, product source, driving after consumption, and riding in a vehicle with a driver who had consumed cannabis).

The target population of the voluntary NCS was the household population aged 15 and older in each province. NCS (provincial) samples contained an average of 5,651 respondents and had an average response rate of 50%. The majority of survey respondents (61%) completed the online survey unassisted by using the secure access code sent by mail. The remainder were contacted by phone and asked to participate with the aid of a trained interviewer.

Cannabis includes marijuana, hashish, hash oil and any other preparation of the cannabis plant.

Data on cannabis source are based on responses to the following question: "In the past three months, where did you get the cannabis you used?" Eleven response categories were provided and reduced to five for this analysis: 1) Grow—I grow or someone else grows; 2) Legal—authorized retailer or online from a licensed producer; 3) Illegal—Compassion club, dispensary or storefront, online from another source, acquaintance, or dealer; 4) Friends or family—family member or friend or shared around a group of friends; 5) Other.

In an effort to better understand the purchasing behaviours of cannabis consumers, and because consumers can access cannabis from multiple sources, people who reported accessing cannabis from a legal source were further sub-divided to distinguish persons who accessed cannabis only from a legal source from those reporting more than one source.

Data limitations and cautions

The information in the release is self-reported and has not been validated. Social desirability and fear of punishment, both of which are potential sources of bias, may be especially relevant to this analysis. Changes over time in respondents' willingness to admit drug use may have influenced the statistics but remains difficult to measure.

For more information on cannabis statistics, consult the Cannabis Stats Hub. Statistics Canada is collecting information on cannabis prices through a crowdsourcing site: StatsCannabis. Please visit the site and share your information with confidence, as participation is anonymous.

Available tables: table [13-10-0383-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5262](#).

The article "[What has changed since cannabis was legalized?](#)" is now available in the February 2020 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 31, no. 2 ([82-003-X](#)).

This issue of *Health Reports* also contains the article "[Associations between parent and child sedentary behaviour and physical activity in early childhood](#)."

The infographic "[Cannabis legalization: What has changed?](#)" is now available as part of the series *Statistics Canada – Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)).

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For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).

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