

What is Cannabis?

Cannabis is the world's most commonly used illicit drug and is derived from the Indian Hemp plant. There are two main varieties, Sativa and Indica. Other names for Cannabis include: Marijuana, Hashish, Pot, Dope, Grass, Weed, and Ganja. It is now legalised **for medicinal use** in SVG.



A complex mixture of compounds (cannabinoids) can be extracted from the cannabis plant. Two of the main active ingredients are **Delta-9 Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)** and **Cannabidiol (CBD)**. THC is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream and taken to the central nervous system, producing a 'high', altering the user's mood, reflexes, memory and perception. CBD diminishes some of the psychoactive effects of THC and is considered to have therapeutic effects on pain, inflammation, and anxiety. Together with other cannabinoids, THC and CBD are used to treat a large number of medical conditions including: **chronic pain**, epilepsy, sleep disorders, and several inflammatory disorders.

The Two Main Forms of Cannabis are:

- Dried plant material and is usually smoked in a 'joint' (or through a bong), or vaporised
- As an oil extracted from plant material, such as Butane Hash Oils - which are made up of concentrated Cannabis extracts/resins.

The Effects of Cannabis

The effect of any drug depends on a variety of factors. These include: the quantity consumed, the weight of the user, past drug experiences, method or route through which it is consumed, and whether alcohol or other drugs and medications are taken along with it. **These factors which vary from person to person can produce significant and unexpected side effects.**

What are Common Effects of Cannabis?

- Impaired reflexes and coordination increase the risk of accidents.
- A 'high' - with a tendency to talk, giggle or laugh more than usual.
- Difficulty with short term memory retention and retrieval.
- An increase in heart rate.
- **Decreased inhibitions**; users may be more likely to engage in risky behaviour such as unsafe sexual practice or dangerous driving.
- If smoked, some effects on the lungs are similar to Tobacco. It can worsen Asthma, Cough, and other **Respiratory problems**.

Short-Term Effects: Large Doses

The most common short-term effects of large doses are:

- **Hallucinations**
- Vomiting
- Feelings of panic
- Intense anxiety
- Unconsciousness
- Confusion
- Restlessness
- Redness of the eyes
- Changes in **perception of time**, sound, colour, distance, touch, etc

In these situations, it is important for affected users to be supervised. The effects can last 6-8 hours.

Medical assistance should be sought if persons become Confused, Disoriented or Unconscious.

The Long-Term Side Effects

- Increased risk of damage to the lungs and their functions, and an increased risk of chronic lung disease such as bronchitis.
- Exacerbation of pre-existing **Cardiovascular Disease**.
- Decrease to recall from short term memory.
- **Increased risk of serious Mental Illnesses**, particularly if usage begins during adolescence.

Not for Pregnant Women

Women who are pregnant or nursing should avoid the use of cannabis due to an associated risk of infantile developmental problems.

CANNABIS

AN INFORMATION GUIDE



Driving Under the Influence of Cannabis:

Cannabis use can increase the risk of vehicular accidents due to **slow reaction time**, blurred vision, poor judgement and drowsiness. Cannabis users should be discouraged from driving or operating heavy machinery. These effects can last several hours and are **increased with alcohol use**.

Cannabis & Mental Illness...

It is well established that the use of Cannabis increases the risk of developing psychotic disorders like schizophrenia. It can also **worsen symptoms** in people with: psychosis, delusions, mood swings, and hallucinations. These outcomes are associated with cannabis strains containing high levels of THC. Users with a familial or personal history of mental disorders should **avoid High THC Cannabis**. Users should also check with their Doctor about possible interactions with prescribed medications.

How Long Do Cannabis Effects Last?

- Intoxicating effects occur within seconds to minutes, and can last for three hours.
- For large doses the effects **last longer**.
- Effects on thinking and co-ordination can last for 12 hours and up to 24 hours.
- Short term memory loss can last for a number of weeks.
- Once consumed, a single dose can take **up to 30 days** to be completely eliminated from the body.

Can users become Cannabis dependent?

Evidence suggests that up to 9% of regular users can become **psychologically dependent** on Cannabis. Dependence can negatively affect personal relationships, education, employment and many other aspects of an individual's life.

More Information & Help

Your family doctor, school nurse or counsellor can provide more information, advice or assistance about Cannabis. You can also refer to other community health services, if necessary.

Information can also be obtained by contacting SVG-Alcohol and Drug Information Service or the Ministry of Health;

- Psychosocial Unit: 1784-458-6185
- Psychology Unit: 1784-456-1111 Ext 115

WARNING! Cannabis, like alcohol and many other substances, can make children very sick. Care should be taken to avoid exposing children to cannabis, or products containing cannabis, unless it is directly prescribed by a trained physician.



Tele: 1784-456-8113

WWW.MCA.VC

While Medicinal Cannabis has been legalised in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, its recreational use is still illegal!