

Understanding Medical Marijuana

Why It's Not Legally Medicine



The word medicine as generally defined by the dictionary means, “something, such as a compound or preparation, used to affect well-being and alleviate, treat, or prevent disease or illness.” In Ohio, it’s been legal to use marijuana as medicine since 2016. However, using marijuana medicinally is not the same as medical marijuana being medicine.

That’s because, in the United States, drugs, including prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) drugs, are regulated by Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Since all drugs have side effects¹, an FDA review team comprised of medical doctors, chemist, microbiologists, and others, are charged with evaluating whether the benefits outweigh the risks before approving a drug as medicine.

While there is ongoing research into the potential pain-relieving properties and modes of action of the marijuana plant, marijuana has not been rigorously researched for effectiveness, side effects, and interactions². Further, it has not yet followed modern medical protocols, including clinical trials, quality controls, standardized composition, and uniform dosing specificity. Nor is it distributed within regulated pharmaceutical channels. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is not approved as medicine by the FDA.³

If not medicine, then what is it?

Marijuana is the dried leaves and flowers of the cannabis plant. It contains mind-altering and active compounds, and is used recreationally as well as therapeutically for certain conditions.⁴

- ✓ Medical marijuana refers to the entire plant.
- ✓ It cannot be distinguished from non-medical marijuana.
- ✓ It contains the same, mind-altering ingredients as marijuana that’s not part of the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program.
- ✓ It is a federally illegal substance.⁵

Cannabis and Cannabis-Derived Products

Of its 483 known compounds, the marijuana plant’s main psychoactive component is tetrahydrocannabinol or THC. It also contains at least 65 other cannabinoids (substances), including cannabidiol or CBD.⁶

To date, the FDA has not approved marijuana for the treatment of any disease or condition. It has, however, approved one marijuana-derived drug product and three synthetic marijuana-related drug products, respectively:⁷

- Epidiolex (cannabidiol)
- Marinol (dronabinol)
- Syndros (dronabinol)
- Cesamet (nabilone)

The Call for Research

To determine the safety and efficacy of a possible medication, the FDA follows a strict, evidence-based protocol and approval process that requires carefully conducted clinical trials on thousands of human subjects.

More than a dozen public health organizations, including the American Society of Addiction Medicine, the American Medical Association, and the World Health Organization, have called for continued and extensive research to better understand of the risks, rewards, and health impact of marijuana and marijuana-derived products.⁸

About This Campaign

Because much of the public conversation surrounding marijuana has been based on anecdotes rather than science, Prevention Action Alliance and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services created this campaign to help people better understand the facts about marijuana and its effects.

If you found this article helpful, we encourage you to share it with others. You can also find other fact sheets about marijuana at: preventionactionalliance.org/marijuana

If you have concerns about your own use of marijuana or a loved one's, and wish to seek help, go to: findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

Contact Us

For more information on Medical Marijuana, please contact us at:
Prevention Action Alliance
(614) 540-9985
preventionactionalliance.org

About Us

Prevention
Action Alliance

Prevention Action Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit located in Columbus, Ohio. We're dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Learn more at preventionactionalliance.org.



The mission of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) is to provide statewide leadership on the topics of mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery. Learn more about OhioMHAS at mha.ohio.gov.

1. [fda.gov/drugs/drug-information-consumers/fdas-drug-review-process-continued](https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-information-consumers/fdas-drug-review-process-continued)

2. [medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/modern+medicine](https://www.medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/modern+medicine)

3. [cdc.gov/marijuana/faqs/is-marijuana-medicine.html](https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/faqs/is-marijuana-medicine.html)

4. [cdc.gov/marijuana/faqs/what-is-marijuana.html](https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/faqs/what-is-marijuana.html)

5. [dea.gov/drug-scheduling](https://www.dea.gov/drug-scheduling)

6. [nccih.nih.gov/health/cannabis-marijuana-and-cannabinoids-what-you-need-to-know](https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/cannabis-marijuana-and-cannabinoids-what-you-need-to-know)

7. [fda.gov/news-events/public-health-focus/fda-and-cannabis-research-and-drug-approval-process](https://www.fda.gov/news-events/public-health-focus/fda-and-cannabis-research-and-drug-approval-process)

8. [asam.org/docs/default-source/public-policy-statements/marijuana-cannabinoids-and-legalization-9-21-2015.pdf?sfvrsn=38e06fc2_0](https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/public-policy-statements/marijuana-cannabinoids-and-legalization-9-21-2015.pdf?sfvrsn=38e06fc2_0)