

# Advisory: Cannabis Use & Withdrawal

## Impacts on Health, Safety and Performance

### Background

- Cannabis's effects on cognitive function, mental health, and physical performance raise concerns in high-stakes environments where focus, decision-making, and teamwork are critical. Reducing or quitting cannabis use just before a deployment or other activity where cannabis is restricted can cause cannabis withdrawal symptoms and impair performance.
- While cannabis is legal in Canada, the DND and CAF have their own regulations governing its use. Restrictions apply based on duty status, operational roles, and deployment requirements.
- Policies aim to protect service members' health, safety, and operational readiness and also to ensure treatment and support for recovery as per the Canadian Human Rights Act.
- Cannabis is a plant known for its psychoactive properties, containing hundreds of chemical substances, including over 100 cannabinoids like THC and CBD. Cannabis is consumed in a variety of ways that affect absorption and withdrawal. Products with various concentrations have different impacts.

### Leaders Be Proactive!

Foster a Safe, Inclusive & Aware Team

- **Build Trust and a Safe Environment** – Communicate openly and supportively with your team. It fosters trust and creates a secure and comfortable atmosphere to discuss well-being. It will help team members to seek support when needed.
- **Clarify Responsibilities** – Inform team members about their obligations regarding cannabis use well before any restrictions take effect.
- **Recognize Readiness and Safety Risks** – Inform members about health, safety, readiness and performance risks from cannabis product consumption and withdrawal.
- **Plan Ahead & Promote Medical Support** – Encourage team members to seek professional help to quit cannabis safely before deployment or other activity where cannabis is restricted.
- **Explain Withdrawal Timeframe** – Emphasize that withdrawal symptoms may emerge within days of stopping use and may persist for three weeks or longer.

### Cannabis Withdrawal

Safety, Performance & Readiness Concerns

**Withdrawal can cause symptoms** which may include sleep difficulties, strange dreams, anxiety, restlessness, depression, irritability, nervousness, anger, headaches and physical discomfort.

- Sleep disturbances and cognitive challenges may **reduce alertness and performance**.
- Mental health challenges, including anxiety and mood issues may **impact decision-making and interpersonal interactions**.
- Irritability and mood swings may **strain team dynamics** and relationships, and affect morale and trust.
- **Impaired coordination and motor skills**, may pose safety risks during operational tasks and exercises.
- Members may **turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms** when cannabis is not available.
- Withdrawal may go **unrecognized as the symptoms are similar to those of mental and physical stress or illness**.
- Withdrawal risks are **greater among regular users and users of higher amounts**.
- Cognitive and physical withdrawal **symptoms may occur even with a minimal amount of cannabis use**.



## Cannabis Use-Reducing the Risk

- **Stay Informed** – Understand the risks of cannabis use and withdrawal, its impact on health and safety, and how to access support when needed.
- **Practice Safer Use** – Implement lower-risk strategies to reduce cannabis related harms. Understand that in some cases avoiding cannabis is the safest option.
- **Recognize Warning Signs** – Be aware of the signs that someone may be struggling with cannabis use or experiencing withdrawal symptoms.
- **Educate Yourself** – Learn about cannabis, its health effects, and available support resources, including healthcare providers and health promotion personnel.
- **Promote Informed Choices** – Encourage informed decision-making and recognize that, in some cases, avoiding cannabis is the safest option.

### Policy on Use of Cannabis by CAF Members

DAOD 9004-1, Use of Cannabis by CAF Members outlines the rules regarding cannabis use to ensure safety and operational effectiveness. Familiarize yourself with it.



## DND SUPPORT SERVICES & RESOURCES Cannabis Use Health Literacy



**Defence Team- Mental health and wellness**



**Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines**



**Knowing Your Limits with Cannabis Self-help**

**STRENGTHENING THE ENERGISER LES FORCES**

**#STF** is the CAF/DND's health promotion program, offering expert information, guidance, training, tools, and leadership support to enhance CAF members' health and well-being.



Contact your health promotion office for more information.

