

OPP discusses first year of cannabis legalization in Ontario

Exactly one year after the legalization of cannabis, new Cannabis Act Regulations that legalize edibles has come into force. The Regulations will allow the legal production and sale of edibles/beverages, extracts and topicals. Although these new products are now legal, don't expect to see them in stores for some time.

The earliest date the new products could be available for purchase in the Ontario Cannabis Store or private retailers authorized by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) is mid-December.

What Edibles Can I Buy?

Exactly what the products will be is still not clear, however what we do know is there will be strict rules around THC content, production, packaging and labelling. For example:

THC limit for edible cannabis products (including drinks) is 10 milligrams per package and cannot be combined with nicotine or alcohol.

Labelling guidelines require the product packaging to specify THC and CBD (or cannabidiol) content and other information, including a health warning message, and products should not make any health, dietary or cosmetic claims.

All packaging should be plain and child resistant.

One of the most important guidelines issued by Health Canada under the Regulations is that edible cannabis products should not appeal to young people. While colourful cannabis-infused gummies in the shape of animals are popular on the black market, don't expect to see them on the shelves of legal cannabis retailers.

Through another lottery, Ontario will get 50 more stores beginning later this year - eight within First Nations. Those who wish to produce or sell legal edible cannabis products must obtain a licence from Health Canada.

What did the First Year Look Like?

Seeing and smelling clouds of cannabis in public places is the current reality, but what about the illegal side of cannabis? StatsCan data shows the output in Canada's cannabis black market declined by 21 per cent since cannabis was legalized.

The OPP has made strides in tackling the black market leading a cannabis enforcement strategy that includes Provincial Joint Forces Cannabis Enforcement Teams (PJFCET) with other Ontario police services. The OPP-led PJFCET focus on organized crime, illicit cannabis supply, illegal storefronts and illegal online enterprises, as well as the individuals selling and distributing illegal cannabis.

Is the OPP Closing Illegal Stores?

In November 2018, prior to the establishment of the PJFCET, there were 84 illegal cannabis stores operating in Non-First Nation communities across Ontario. To date, the teams have closed 67 illegal cannabis storefronts, and 20 residential dwellings selling cannabis. The threat of the PJFCET's enforcement action has also resulted in the voluntary closure of eight additional illegal storefronts in the city of Hamilton in April - all of which have remained closed.

These operations have seized \$12.3 million worth of cannabis and other drugs and approximately \$2 million dollars in currency, vehicles and property restraints. As a result of the teams' enforcement, a significant amount of illegal and unsafe cannabis products including edibles has been stopped from entering the market.

Be aware, any product that contains cannabis can only be purchased from an authorized licensed retailer or online at the Ontario Cannabis Store, this includes CBD products. Topical lotions, edibles, etc. that contain CBD are also treated the same as products containing THC and enforcement action has and can be taken against illegal sellers of CBD products.

What about Drug-Impaired Driving?

Keeping our roads free of impaired drivers remains a concern of the OPP and the communities we serve. Young, novice and commercial motor vehicle drivers now have more to worry about if they're driving under the influence of cannabis and other drugs.

The OPP recently acquired 23 approved oral fluid screening devices, to provide an additional frontline tool to detect the presence of cannabis and cocaine in the three driver classes to which zero tolerance sanctions apply under the Highway Traffic Act.

While we have acquired these new devices, the use of Standardized Field Sobriety Testing (SFST) training and Drug Recognition Experts (DRE) will continue to be the primary enforcement tools against drug-impaired drivers to help keep Ontario roads safe.

Can I Transport Cannabis in my Vehicle?

When transporting cannabis, including legal store-bought edibles, the rules remain the same. Cannabis in a vehicle or boat must be in its original package that has not been opened, or packed in baggage that is fastened closed or is not otherwise readily available to any person in the vehicle or boat otherwise you could face a fine of \$175. To be safe, store it in the trunk.