

# Cannabis Information for Schools and School Boards

**As of October 17, 2018, recreational cannabis is legal across Ontario for adults 19 years of age and older. Schools and school boards may have questions about the rules for recreational cannabis at school, on school property and at school-related activities, the impact legalization may have on schools, and what information and supports are available for educators, parents/guardians and students.**

## Rules for minimum age

The law sets a minimum age of 19 to use, buy, possess and cultivate cannabis in Ontario. This is the same as the minimum age for tobacco and alcohol sales.

Even though recreational cannabis is legal for adults 19 years of age and older, it is still prohibited in schools, on school property and at school-related activities.

## Current rules for Ontario schools

The rules related to recreational cannabis in schools generally remain the same. Recreational cannabis is no longer classified as an illegal drug, and is explicitly prohibited like alcohol. Suspension will be considered if a student is found in possession of recreational cannabis, depending on the results of the principal's investigation.

A positive school climate and a safe learning and teaching environment are essential for student success. Everyone has a role to play in promoting a positive school climate.

## Student Mental Health and Well-Being

Student mental health and well-being are very important. While educators do not provide mental health and addictions services, they are in a unique position to recognize changes in behaviour. The Ministry of Education continues to work with the education sector to equip educators with the tools and knowledge they need to 1) identify potential child and youth mental health and addictions issues and 2) respond effectively.

## Working to protect youth

The Ministry of Education is working collaboratively with community partners and other ministries across government to prevent and/or delay cannabis use among youth, promote healthy decision-making and ensure student safety. This includes the development of resources on informed decision-making, substance use, addictions and related behaviours, and supports available for students and families.

## Curriculum connections

### Q: What do students currently learn about cannabis in school?

**A:** Cannabis is mentioned predominantly within the Health and Physical Education Curriculum in the following ways:

- The curriculum covers substance use, addictions and related behaviours.
- Student learning about cannabis and other drugs occurs directly within the Healthy Living component of the elementary Health and Physical Education curriculum and in secondary Healthy Active Living Education courses.
- While learning about cannabis is specifically addressed in Grade 6, student learning about substance use, abuse and misuse is part of a continuum of learning that extends from Grades 1 to 12.

Cannabis is also mentioned in Grade 11 and 12 Canadian and World Studies – Law.

## Suspensions and expulsions

### Q: What school policies are impacted by the legalization of recreational cannabis?

**A:** *Ontario's Cannabis Act, 2017* amended the suspension, expulsion, and code of conduct provisions in the *Education Act* so that recreational cannabis remains prohibited at school, on school property and at school-related activities.

The *Education Act* requires:

- consideration for suspension if a student is under the influence or in possession of recreational cannabis while at school, on school property or at a school-related activity;
- suspension (and possible expulsion) if a student gives cannabis to a minor; and
- school boards and school authorities to update their codes of conduct to discourage the use of recreational cannabis (amended from “discourage the use of alcohol and illegal drugs”). Note: each school board and school authority is required to have a code of conduct that includes standards of behaviour for students, teachers and all other individuals involved in the publicly funded school system.
- The following policies have been updated and posted on the ministry’s website. School boards and school authorities are expected to update their existing Codes of Conduct and policies on bullying prevention and intervention and progressive discipline accordingly:
  - ✦ PPM – 128 *Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct*
  - ✦ PPM – 144 *Bullying Prevention and Intervention*
  - ✦ PPM – 145 *Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour*

### Q: Is possession of cannabis still a possible reason to suspend a student?

**A:** Yes.

- Possession of cannabis (except for medical purposes, if authorized by a health care practitioner such as a Physician or a Nurse Practitioner) is not permitted while at school, on school property or at school-related activities.
- Suspension is considered for a student under the influence or in possession of cannabis.

- Where a principal believes that any student has provided cannabis to a minor, the student must be suspended pending the principal's investigation, to determine whether to recommend to the board that the student be expelled.
- Before suspending a student, determining the length of the suspension (which could be up to 20 school days) or whether to recommend the student be expelled, the principal must consider the individual circumstances of the student and must take into account mitigating and other factors. Examples of mitigating factors include circumstances in which:
  - ✦ The student does not have the ability to control their behaviour.
  - ✦ The student does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of their behaviour.
  - ✦ The student's continuing presence in the school does not create an unacceptable risk to the safety of any person.

**Q: What resources are available to principals and other board staff dealing with suspensions related to cannabis?**

**A:** The Ministry of Education updated the following policies to support principals and other board staff with suspensions related to cannabis:

- [PPM 144 – Bullying Prevention and Intervention](#)
- [PPM 145 – Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour](#)

A number of ministry's resources are also available to principals and other board staff:

- [Reporting and Responding to Incidents: A Resource for Board Employees](#) outlines the responsibilities of all board staff about incidents that could lead to suspension or expulsion.
- [Supporting Bias-Free Progressive Discipline in Schools Resource Guide](#) outlines how system leaders should take mitigating and other factors into consideration at all points along the continuum of progressive discipline. This guide was developed in collaboration with the Ontario Human Rights Commission.
- [Reporting and Responding to Incidents: A Resource for Occasional Teachers](#) outlines the responsibilities for occasional teachers about incidents that could lead to suspension or expulsion.
- [Promoting and Supporting Positive Student Behaviour: A Resource for School Bus Drivers and Principals](#) outlines the responsibilities for school bus drivers and principals about maintaining a positive school environment on school buses.

**Q: My child has been suspended for taking cannabis to school. Where can I learn more about the rules around suspensions?**

**A:** There are a number of resources on the Ministry of Education's website, including:

- [Suspension and Expulsion: What Parents and Students Need to Know](#) outlines the requirements and processes related to suspensions and expulsions.
- [Parents' Guide to the Ontario Code of Conduct](#) outlines expectations for behaviour for everyone in the school community, including students, teachers and administrators.

## Mental health and addictions

**Q: We already have students who we know or suspect are dealing with substance use issues. How do we support them?**

**A:** The ministry's resource, *Supporting Minds*, is a K-12 guide that provides educators with information on the early signs of mental health and addiction problems, along with strategies that can be used in the classroom to support students.

There is a chapter on "Substance Use Problems" that has evidence-based information, including "A Continuum of Warning Signs" and "Strategies for Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment for All Students."

**Q: How can we support students in our schools to help reduce the likelihood that they could develop a substance use issue?**

**A:** To help reduce the likelihood of a student developing a substance use problem, school boards across the province and *School Mental Health ASSIST*, will continue to promote student mental health in schools.

- For example, the work underway in "mentally healthy classrooms" to strengthen a student's self-esteem, coping skills and life skills, and to provide a supportive environment would help to reduce the risk of substance abuse.
- School Mental Health ASSIST provides *modules on creating mentally healthy classrooms*, including common language and everyday mental health and well-being promotion practices that can be adapted for the classroom.

## More information

### Cannabis and legalization:

- Ontario's legalization of recreational cannabis website
- Ontario Cannabis Store
- Government of Canada's legalization of recreational cannabis website
- Cannabis health effects
- Laws and risks of impaired driving
- Cannabis and the Ontario *Human Rights Code*

### Cannabis and Ontario's publicly funded schools:

- Curriculum information for *elementary* and *secondary* students
- *Resources* on safe and accepting schools, including progressive discipline and suspension/expulsions [www.ontario.ca/safeschools](http://www.ontario.ca/safeschools)

### Resources for Parents/Guardians:

- *Cannabis: What Parents/Guardians and Caregivers Need to Know*
- *Cannabis Talk Kit: Know How to Talk to your Teen*
- *Talking to teens about drug use*
- Information from the Ministry of Education about the health and physical education curriculum, safe and accepting schools and more, *available in multiple languages*.