



Magazine

GLOBE MAGAZINE

# 21 questions answered about legal marijuana in Massachusetts

Get the lowdown on when shops will open, how much pot will cost, where you can legally smoke it, and more FAQs.





JASON SCHNEIDER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

By [Dan Adams](#) JUNE 21, 2018

Massachusetts voters said “yes” to legal marijuana in November 2016. Now, a year-and-a-half later, one might reasonably wonder, *Where’s the weed at?* Short answer: It’s already all around you. Marijuana consumers and patients are your colleagues, relatives, friends, and neighbors. But we get it, you want to know when you can walk into a store and buy some without a medical recommendation. The Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission has started processing completed applications from would-be marijuana businesses and the first stores should open sometime in July. You probably have some other questions, too. Let’s get you up to speed.

## 1. Where can I buy it?

At first, it’s likely that the only places selling cannabis will be a few of the existing medical dispensaries that [obtain recreational licenses](#), too. That makes sense — they already have crops growing and stores set up. A few new retailers selling marijuana sourced from those medical cultivators might also pop up, but the difficulty of winning

local permission remains a significant bottleneck for pot companies.

## **2. How much will marijuana cost? Is there a limit on how much I can buy?**

Right now, an eighth of an ounce of cannabis flower goes for about \$50 at a medical dispensary. Recreational demand will be higher, though, and it remains unclear how many suppliers will get licenses in the early going. So it's possible prices will spike this summer if demand is high; in other states, prices have subsequently crashed as the industry matured and supply and competition increased. You'll be allowed [to buy](#) up to an ounce at a time.

## **3. How high is the tax on marijuana?**

Recreational marijuana will be subject to a total state tax of 17 percent. Communities can tack on a local tax rate of up to 3 percent, so let's call it 20 percent in total. Marijuana sales to registered patients at medical dispensaries or hybrid recreational-medical stores will remain untaxed.

## **4. Is it legal or safe to drive while high? Will the police conduct sobriety checks for pot?**

It's [very illegal](#). Don't do it. There's currently no breathalyzer for marijuana like there is for alcohol. A positive test would only show that you've used cannabis recently, not that you were high when you were pulled over. Last summer, a state court ruled that police can't use the usual roadside touch-your-nose tests that were designed for alcohol to measure marijuana impairment. Instead, police are being trained in new techniques to qualify as experts in identifying drugged drivers.







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### **5. Is there a difference between medical marijuana and recreational marijuana?**

Not really. The difference lies in how and why you use it. Some special strains cultivated for medical purposes are legitimately different, such as Charlotte's Web, which contains almost none of the high-causing THC and more seizure-preventing CBD.

### **6. Are edibles safe to eat? What's the difference, in terms of effect, between edibles and smoking?**

There's nothing inherently unsafe about edibles, especially those that have been tested for sale in a regulated marijuana store. But THC metabolizes into a different compound when consumed orally than when it's smoked, so it does feel subjectively different. Experienced consumers will tell you they get a heavier "body high" from edibles.

### **7. Can marijuana have destabilizing effects on younger people's brains?**

Some research suggests a negative effect on cognition, while other studies failed to find much correlation. But look: Unless they're taking it to treat a medical condition, there's no upside to teens using the stuff, and they shouldn't.

### **8. What should I do if my pet gets into my stash — or decides to eat my cannabis plant?**

Marijuana flower is not orally active unless you've processed it (for example, by cooking it into melted butter). It might give Mittens a stomachache, but is unlikely to cause much damage. Edibles are another matter, but again,

there's little medical (or in this case veterinary) professionals can do to stop a high. The chocolate in the weed brownies might be more dangerous to Fido than the weed. Bottom line: Give the vet a call, but don't panic. Also, store your weed somewhere secure — a glass mason jar with a lid works nicely — not in a plastic baggie where the puppies can reach it.





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**9. Does pot have an expiration date?**

Properly stored cannabis can retain its potency for months, if not years. To maximize shelf life, store it in an airtight container in a dark, cool place. Don't put it in the fridge or freezer: When you take it out, humidity will condense on the pot and get it wet, which can cause mold growth. (Of course, this advice doesn't apply to edibles, which may be perishable depending on the other ingredients.)

**10. Can employers still require drug tests for marijuana once it's legal?**

In Massachusetts, yes, employers can still test for marijuana. But in a tight labor market and with the increasing prevalence of pot use, many employers now skip the drug test (or at least disregard the marijuana portion of it) for employees who aren't driving forklifts or performing other safety-critical tasks.

**11. What happens if I buy weed from an unlicensed seller?**

To you? Probably nothing. It's illegal to sell marijuana without a license, but generally legal to buy it. Of course, the

illicit market comes with other risks, including contaminated products and shady suppliers.

## **12. Can I get my pot delivered?**

The Cannabis Control Commission has delayed the implementation of delivery licenses, likely until early next year. Medical dispensaries are allowed to deliver to medical patients, however, and several already offer this service.

There are plenty of gray-market delivery providers on the Internet, including some claiming to be legal under the “caregiver” provision of the medical marijuana law. Others offer products that come with a “free gift” of pot that just so happens to be worth the cost of the other item. State authorities have made it clear such transactions are illegal, but they haven’t cracked down on them.

## **13. Am I allowed to grow marijuana in my backyard?**

Yep, as long as it’s secured and can’t be seen from the street without binoculars, you’re good to grow. But most people prefer to cultivate indoors, where they can control the lighting cycle more easily and don’t have to worry about the weather. Each household can grow six plants, or 12 if more than one adult lives there.

## **14. What are the rules for traveling with weed? Can I take it to Cape Cod with me on the weekends?**

You can absolutely bring your weed to Cape Cod — just carry an ounce or less at a time and keep it in a secure compartment of the car (glovebox, trunk) while you’re slogging over the Sagamore Bridge at 2 miles per hour.

## **15. What about bringing it to a state like New Hampshire, where pot is not legal?**

Crossing state lines with marijuana is illegal under federal law — but then again, so is possessing it under federal law, even within Massachusetts. The truth is, the feds almost always have better things to do than crack down on people who have a small amount of pot and aren’t trying to sell it.



In New Hampshire, possession of three-quarters of an ounce or less of cannabis has been decriminalized, and will get you a \$100 ticket. The limit is lower than in Massachusetts. Bottom line: Check the laws before you travel, exercise discretion, and don't smoke in the car.

### **16. Can I smoke weed anywhere now — on a restaurant patio or on the beach, for example?**

Smoking in public is not allowed and is punishable by a \$100 ticket. Smoking outdoors on private property is allowed with permission from the property owner, but restaurants have smoke-free rules to worry about, and we're not aware of any that openly allow marijuana use.

### **PLUS, FIVE NEWBIE FAQs**





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**17. I've never used marijuana before but I'd like to try it. Where should I begin?**

First, you have to decide how you're going to consume marijuana. Dr. Jordan Tishler, a Massachusetts physician and Harvard Medical School graduate who specializes in cannabis, recommends starting with a "sip" or two from a flower vaporizer. Vapor is less harsh than the smoke from combusting marijuana in a joint or a pipe (really a "bowl," if we're using proper stoner terminology), kicks in just as quickly, and tends to deliver a smaller, more controlled dose. You should feel something relatively quickly, but give it 10 or 15 minutes before having more

just to be safe.

Marijuana-infused foods (“edibles”) aren’t a great place to begin. They can take hours to kick in, and the effects can last equally as long. The classic rookie mistake is getting impatient, deciding it’s not working, and eating more, only to be run over by a train of overwhelming stoned-ness later on. If you insist on going the edible route, start with 5 milligrams (or half of that if you’re unsure) and wait 24 hours before taking more.

If you don’t want to invest in a vaporizer, Tishler suggests starting with a hit or two from a joint. Then, put it out or pass it to a friend. An entire joint of a potent strain could put even a veteran stoner on the floor.

It’s important to remember that the relationship between the amount of marijuana you consume and how high you feel is far less linear than with alcohol and drunkenness. Your first time, you might smoke and smoke but feel nothing (that’s normal, try again). Another day, you might take one hit off a joint and embark on a psychedelic tour of the universe. Your own physiology, mind-set, and the setting in which you consume marijuana makes a difference. You’ll get a feel for your own sensitivity and preferences over time. Pay more attention to your own mind and body than what others tell you.

### **18. What should I do if I get too high?**

Take a deep breath. Unclench. You’re going to be OK. While it’s certainly possible to get uncomfortably high, the likelihood that you’re actually suffering some acute medical problem is close to zero. You could practically eat your own body weight in marijuana and not “overdose.” The drug simply isn’t toxic like that. What you’re really experiencing is anxiety.

Tishler says there’s little point in going to the emergency room just because you got too high. (Obviously, you

should always use your best judgment, especially if you have a serious preexisting ailment.) There's no Narcan-like drug for marijuana that can suddenly reverse its effects. The ER is full of bright lights and loud noises. You need the opposite: dark, quiet, and relative solitude. Get in bed under the covers, and if you can, have a friend help you calm down.

"Remind yourself nothing bad can happen," Tishler says. "If you're with other people, have someone hold your hand. Physical touch is very grounding — it can help tie the balloon back to earth, so to speak."

Also not helpful, according to Tishler, are various stoner folk remedies, which include taking CBD (a non-psychoactive compound in cannabis) and chewing peppercorns. In fact, the only time Tishler mentioned death in an hour-long interview about the risks of marijuana use was when he warned that people could accidentally aspirate peppercorn and suffocate when it makes their airways swell up. So, yeah, don't do that.

### **19. Will I get a hangover?**

Unlikely. You might feel slightly "fuzzy" or unfocused after a night of indulging, but it's nothing even close to the headaches and nausea associated with alcohol. Reanimation should require little more than a glass of water or a cup of hot coffee.

### **20. How do I choose between different varieties of pot?**

Enthusiasts put a lot of stock in the supposed differences between various strains of marijuana — craft beer all over again — but, in truth, a lot of that is marketing. Instead, pay attention to the potency (15 percent THC is on the lighter side, 30 percent is rocket fuel).

### **21. Can I get high if I'm not smoking but am around people who are?**

That's pretty unlikely, unless you're literally locked in a phone booth with a gaggle of stoners chain-smoking Js. More likely, your clothes will just smell like weed. But chronic secondhand exposure to smoke in general is bad for your health.

*Dan Adams is a Globe reporter covering the marijuana industry. Subscribe to his newsletter, *The Week in Weed*, at [www.bostonglobe.com/twiw](http://www.bostonglobe.com/twiw). Send comments to [dadams@globe.com](mailto:dadams@globe.com).*

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