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Marijuana legalization is sweeping the US. See every state where cannabis is legal.

Jeremy Berke, Shayanne Gal, and Yeji Jesse Lee Updated May 27, 2022, 7:34 PM

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Marijuana legalization is spreading around the US. Crystal Cox/Business Insider

Marijuana is legal for adults in 19 states and Washington, DC. Medical marijuana is legal in 38 states and DC.

A slew of states have passed cannabis reform measures in recent months

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Marijuana legalization is spreading around the US.

Since 2012, 19 states and Washington, DC, have legalized marijuana for adults over the age of 21. And 38 states and DC have legalized medical marijuana — meaning that a majority of Americans have access to cannabis, whether medically or recreationally.

Recently, a slew of populous states have legalized both medical and recreational cannabis, including New York and New Jersey. Rhode Island joined the fold in May.

New Jersey was one of four states, along with Arizona, Montana, and South Dakota, where voters backed recreational cannabis in the November 2020 elections.

In South Dakota, both medical and recreational cannabis ballot measures passed in the 2020 elections, though the state's recreational law was struck down by the state's Supreme Court last year. Insider doesn't include South Dakota in our tally of markets where the substance is legal for recreational use, though it's back on the ballot for the election this year.

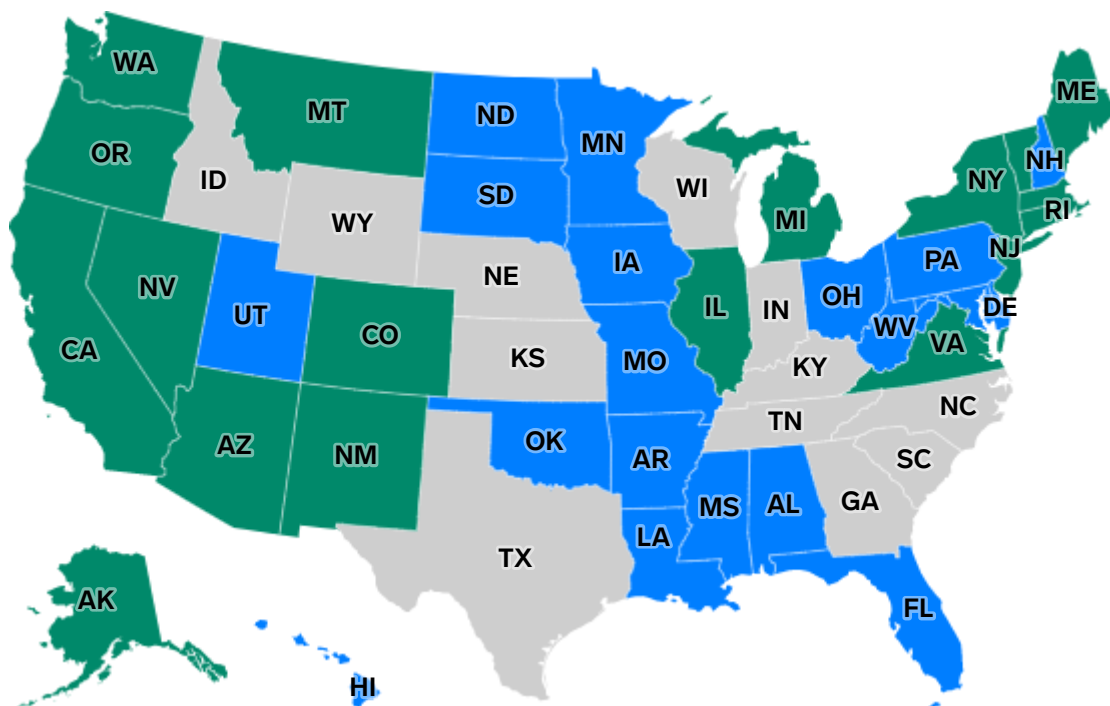
New Mexico, Virginia, and Connecticut have also recently legalized adult-use cannabis, while Alabama has authorized medical marijuana.

Canada legalized marijuana federally in 2018, but US has not followed suit. Marijuana is still considered an illegal Schedule I drug by the US government.

See all the states where marijuana is legal:

States where cannabis is legal

Recreational Medical Illegal



Note: Updated as of May 27, 2022.

Map: Shayanne Gal/Insider

INSIDER

This article was first published in January 2018 and has been updated with new information about where cannabis is legal. It was last updated on May 27. Melia Russell contributed to an earlier version of this story.

A cannabis-testing laboratory in Santa Ana, California. AP Photo/Chris Carlson

Adults 21 and over can light up in Alaska. In 2015, the northernmost US state made it legal for residents to use, possess, and transport up to an ounce of marijuana — roughly a sandwich bag full — for recreational use. The first pot shop opened for business in 2016.

Alaska has pounced on the opportunity to make its recreational-pot shops a destination for tourists. More than 2 million people visit Alaska annually and spend \$2 billion.

Arizona

Nate McDonald, General Manager of Curaleaf NY operations, talks about medical marijuana plants. AP Photo/Hans Pennink

Arizona in 2020 voted to legalize cannabis for all adults over the age of 21.

The measure had support from almost 60% of Arizona voters.

The ballot measure was backed by a number of cannabis giants, including Curaleaf, Cresco, and Harvest Enterprises.

The Arizona Department of Health Services began accepting applications for adult-use licenses on January 19, 2021, and approvals were issued just three days later. Sales began immediately.

Arizona rolled out adult-use sales faster than any other state that voted to pass recreational cannabis in the November elections. Companies already operating in the state's medical market had a first crack at recreational customers.

California

A MedMen store in West Hollywood, California, on January 2, 2018. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson

In 1996, California became the first state to legalize medical marijuana. California became even more pot-friendly in 2016 when it made it legal to use and carry up to 1 ounce of marijuana.

The law also permits adults 21 and over to buy up to 8 grams of marijuana concentrates, which are found in edibles, and grow no more than six marijuana plants per household.

A marijuana leaf. AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

In Colorado, there are more marijuana dispensaries than Starbucks and McDonald's combined. The state joined Washington in becoming the first two states to fully legalize the drug in 2012.

Residents and tourists over the age of 21 can buy up to 1 ounce of marijuana or 8 grams of concentrates. Some Colorado counties and cities have passed more restrictive laws.

Connecticut

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Marijuana plants Olena Ruban/Getty Images

On June 18, 2021 the Connecticut legislature legalized cannabis for adults 21 and over and the law took effect on July 1.

Recreational cannabis is now legal in the state and adults are allowed to possess or consume up to 1.5 ounces of marijuana. Sales aren't expected to begin until the end of 2022, according to the state's official website.

Illinois

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker. REUTERS/Jeenah Moon

Illinois lawmakers in June 2019 passed a bill that legalized the possession and commercial sale of marijuana starting on January 1, 2020.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker, who made marijuana legalization a core component of his campaign for office, signed the bill into law.

Illinois is the one of the few states to legalize marijuana sales through the state legislature, rather than a ballot initiative.

Maine

Harvested cannabis plants at Hexo Corp.'s facilities in Gatineau, Quebec, on September 26, 2018. REUTERS/Chris Wattie

A ballot initiative in 2016 gave Maine residents the right to possess up to 2.5 ounces of marijuana, more than double the limit in most other states.

Massachusetts

Medicinal cannabis cigarettes on July 12, 2018, at a cultivation facility in Milford, Massachusetts. AP Photo/Steven

Massachusetts was the first state on the East Coast to legalize marijuana after voters approved the measure in 2016.

Marijuana dispensaries opened their doors to consumers in November 2018. Adults over the age of 21 can purchase up to 1 ounce of marijuana but cannot consume it in public.

Michigan

The Far West Holistic Center dispensary on November 7, 2018, in Detroit. AP Photo/Carlos Osorio

Voters in Michigan passed Proposition 1 in 2018, making it the first state in the Midwest to legalize the possession and sale of marijuana for adults over the age of 21. Adults can possess up to 2.5 ounces of marijuana, and residents can grow up to 12 plants at home.

The law is more permissive than other states with legal marijuana: Most allow residents to

Montana

A CPlant employee organizes a box of hemp for export at the company's farm on the outskirts of Tala, Uruguay, Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020. AP Photo/Matilde Campodonico

Montana in 2020 voted to legalize recreational marijuana for adults 21 and over.

Montana residents are officially allowed to use marijuana as of January 1, 2021. At the start of 2022, the state allowed stores to begin sales.

Nevada

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The Essence cannabis dispensary on July 1, 2017, in Las Vegas. John Locher/AP

Residents and tourists who are 21 and over can buy 1 ounce of marijuana or one-eighth of an ounce of edibles or concentrates in Nevada.

There's bad news if you want to grow your own bud, though. Nevada residents must live 25 miles outside the nearest dispensary to be eligible for a grower's license.

New Jersey

A CPlant employee trims a hemp flower for export at the company's farm on the outskirts of Tala, Uruguay, Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020. AP Photo/Matilde Campodonico

New Jersey in 2020 voted to legalize recreational marijuana for adults 21 and older, opening a market that could near \$1 billion.

In February 2021, Gov. Phil Murphy signed the legalization legislation, after months of back-and-forth arguments about criminal penalties for minors possessing marijuana and the proper way to set up a licensing framework for cannabis sales in the state, among other details.

Sales are expected to start some time in 2022, but it's unclear exactly when. The state had originally aimed for February, but in late January, Jeff Brown, executive director of the state's Cannabis Regulatory Commission, [told NJ.com](#) that there was "still a lot to be done" before shops could open doors.

"There is no firm commitment on timing of when recreational sales will begin," he said.

New Mexico

A participant in a study on the effects of cannabis, shows the marijuana flowers he has grown in his backyard, in Longmont, Colorado, U.S., December 19, 2019. REUTERS/Kevin Mohatt

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed the state's legalization bill in April, after convening a special session of the legislature to hammer out the details.

The law took effect June 29 — allowing state residents to possess and consume marijuana — but recreational sales will not start until April 1, 2022.

New York

A man holds a sign at a pro-legalization rally outside of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office in Manhattan Erik McGregor/LightRocket via Getty Images

After two failed attempts to legalize adult-use cannabis in New York, the state finally passed recreational marijuana on March 31, 2021.

Though New Yorkers are now able to possess and smoke cannabis legally, sales aren't expected to begin until much later.

Andrew Carter, an analyst at Stifel, said he expects recreational cannabis sales to begin in late 2022. Analysts from Cantor Fitzgerald and Stifel estimated that New York could become a \$5 billion cannabis market by 2025.

Oregon

Oregon's Finest medical-marijuana dispensary in Portland, Oregon, on April 8, 2014. Anthony Bolante/Reuters

Oregon legalized marijuana in 2015, and sales in the state started October 1 of that year.

South Dakota

A team member of Aurora Cannabis works in the grow room at Aurora Sky cannabis growing greenhouse in Alberta, Canada, in this 2018 handout image. Alberta Cannabis Inc/Handout via REUTERS

South Dakota in 2020 voted to legalize both medical and recreational cannabis, the first time a state has voted in favor of both at the same time.

State lawmakers have until April 2022 to create rules around cannabis, including regulations around dispensaries.

South Dakota's legal marijuana program remains mired in legal challenges.

Vermont

Cannabis plants in a laboratory. REUTERS/Leonhard Foeger

Vermont became the first state to legalize marijuana through the legislature, rather than a ballot initiative, when Republican Gov. Phil Scott signed a bill into law in January 2018.

Adults in the Green Mountain State can carry up to 1 ounce of marijuana and grow no more than two plants for recreational use. The law went into effect in July 2018. But it was limited in scope. It didn't establish a legal market for the production and sale of the drug.

In 2020, the state legislature passed a bill that would allow for adult-use sales in the state. All localities must opt-in to allow for dispensaries, however. Sales are expected in 2022.

Virginia

AP Photo/Steven Senne, File

A majority of state legislators in Virginia approved Gov. Ralph Northam's suggestion to legalize the consumption, possession, and cultivation of marijuana on July 1, years earlier than the initial legislation intended.

Commercial cannabis sales are expected to start in September 2022.

Washington

A medical-marijuana plantation on March 21, 2017. REUTERS/Nir Elias

The state allows people to carry up to 1 ounce of marijuana, but they must use the drug for medicinal purposes to be eligible for a grower's license.

Rhode Island

REUTERS/Jorge Dan Lopez

Rhode Island Gov. Dan McKee signed legal marijuana into law on Wednesday May 25, though it will be a few months before cannabis shops are allowed to open.

The law includes expungement of past cannabis convictions.

AP

Residents in the nation's capital voted overwhelmingly to legalize marijuana for adult use in November 2014.

The bill took effect in 2015, allowing people to possess 2 ounces or less of marijuana and "gift" up to an ounce, if neither money nor goods or services are exchanged.

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