

## **B.C. Government News. Public Safety and Solicitor General**

### **Testing finds contaminants in illegal cannabis**

Testing of cannabis seized from illicit retailers in B.C. has found that many samples contained contaminants that would not be allowed in the legal cannabis market.

“My message to people who choose to consume cannabis is simple: buy from legal sellers whose regulated product is subject to national requirements that are in place to protect you,” said Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General. “In addition to the potential health risks, if you buy illegal cannabis, you could also be supporting organized criminal operations that pose a danger to our communities.”

As part of a pilot study, the B.C. Cannabis Secretariat sent 20 dried cannabis samples, seized by the provincial Community Safety Unit from illicit retailers in the Metro Vancouver region, to a federally licensed analytical testing lab in February 2021. Twenty-four distinct pesticides were found in the illicit cannabis samples, along with unacceptable levels of bacteria, fungi, lead and arsenic.

The frequency and variety of contaminants identified indicate that some growers producing for the illicit market may be engaging in practices that pose risks to both consumers and employees handling cannabis.

Cannabis products from licensed producers are strictly regulated to ensure they are fit for human consumption. They must meet federal regulations, including mandatory testing for the presence of solvent residues and contaminants such as pesticides, fungi, bacteria, and heavy metals. In contrast, very little is known about the quality of cannabis sold on the illicit market or production practices used by unlicensed growers in Canada.

The secretariat carried out the pilot study with assistance from the BC Centre for Disease Control and the National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. The latter has authored a blog post, *Unregulated Cannabis: Risky Production Practices Raise Concern for Consumers*, which discusses the test results.

**Learn More:** National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health blog

post: <https://ncceh.ca/content/blog/unregulated-cannabis-risky-production-practices-raise-concern-consumers> Link to cannabis testing results: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/public-safety/cannabis/mblabs-results.pdf>

Get Cannabis Clarity: <https://cannabis.gov.bc.ca/>

Cannabis laws in B.C.: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/cannabis>

Industry roles and responsibilities under the Cannabis Act: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/resources/roles-responsibilities-under-cannabis-act.html>

For translations, visit: <http://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021PSSG0050-001115#translations>

A backgrounder follows.

## **Backgrounders. Facts about cannabis**

- Dried cannabis from illicit retailers was tested to the same requirements Health Canada has established for licence holders under the federal cannabis regulations.
- Dried cannabis produced for sale, and other cannabis products including edibles and extracts, must be tested to federal requirements by a federally licensed analytical testing lab.
- In the regulated market, federal licence holders must send a representative sample of dried cannabis for testing; if the test results show unacceptable levels of bacteria, fungi or mould, the batch cannot be sold.
- If pesticides are detected, the results must be reported to Health Canada and the cannabis must be quarantined.
- Further investigation and analysis must be completed to confirm whether there was deliberate use of pesticides and to determine whether there are any health risks of concern to consumers.
- Across the province, more than 370 legal cannabis retail stores are licensed and operating, including 27 public stores (under the BC Cannabis Stores brand) and 348 private stores.
- BC Cannabis Stores allows consumers across B.C. to purchase cannabis online and have it delivered.
- Like alcohol and tobacco, cannabis may pose a number of short- and long-term health risks.
- People with questions about these risks should consult a health-care provider.

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