

# HALTON SCHOOLS OFFER STUDENTS FACTS ON CANNABIS TO AID IN DECISION MAKING

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*The following is the second in a four-part series, Growing Pains?, a close-up look at the legalization of cannabis and its effects in Halton.*

This fall, as the Oct. 17 date for cannabis legalization approached, Halton schools braced themselves for impact.

School boards made sure supports were in place, parents were notified, resources were posted online, discussions were planned and staff was trained to deal with questions and any possible repercussions of the new legislation.

Then Oct. 17 came and went. And local schools barely felt a thing.

Cannabis may still be illegal for those under 19 in Ontario, but Rebecca Richardson, health and physical education instructional program leader for secondary schools with the Halton District School Board (HDSB), says that doesn't mean the way students are learning about it will remain the same.

"I think most of our educators are tasked with enforcing the fact that just because it's become legal, there are still illegal pieces around it," she said. "In terms of what we focus on, we talk about prevention and health promotion, in terms of delaying use, reducing use and eliminating the risk."

Whereas it was not uncommon in the past for educators to refer to cannabis as a "gateway drug," or to show students graphic videos of individuals overdosing as a tactic to teach them not to use drugs, discourse around the subject is in a state of transformation.

Richardson says that the new curriculum, which is still in the process

of being modified, not only focuses on providing students with the necessary knowledge surrounding cannabis but also helps them develop the skills they require to make the proper decisions, problem solve and advocate for themselves and their peers.

"A new piece that we will probably see in the revised curriculum around this is harm reduction, so it's not just 'don't use' but 'if you have used, how can we support you in reducing your use?' Because it's not a positive behaviour going forward," Richardson said.

She also notes that cannabis is now referred to as a terminus drug, as new research has shown there is no evidence that proves cannabis use opens up the doors to other harder drugs, which is what the previous term "gateway drug" referred to.

While school lessons on cannabis and illegal drugs commence in Grade 6, students learn about substance use and abuse prior to then, in age-appropriate ways, beginning in the primary grades, where children are taught about the addictive qualities of caffeine.

Then in Grades 4 and 5, the focus shifts to alcohol and tobacco use.

Once students reach Grade 6, Richardson says they can now anticipate lessons that focus less on

scare tactics and more on the psychological elements around substance abuse.

"We're kind of taking a different approach now. (We're asking) why people engage in this behaviour in the first place. What are the risk factors and what prevents them from making positive decisions?" she said, adding that students learn about a variety of potential reasons young people engage in substance use and abuse, including peer issues, self-medication, difficult personal experiences and the way drugs are viewed at home.

Tanya Woods, elementary health and physical education instructional program leader at HDSB says students also learn about the connection between drug use and mental health.

"(They learn) the connections as to why people are using and abusing substances to begin with. So, what is it that leads them to the abuse of the substance and how is that connected to a variety of mental health issues," she added.

Richardson says this is just the beginning and there will be more changes to come as the government continues to release further information about cannabis legalization and

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**LOCAL IMPACT:**  
LEGALITY OF POT CHANGES WHAT'S TAUGHT IN OUR SCHOOLS

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A

Vacation access for separated parents is a variation of the normal child access routine. If one parent is taking the child(ren) out of Canada they often require written consent of the other parent at the border.

If you are the parent taking the children you need to give to your former spouse a detailed itinerary well in advance of the vacation and keep the vacation a reasonable length and reasonable location. If you have done this the courts will back you up and allow the vacation. If you are a parent refusing consent to a week long vacation to Disney World you can expect your former spouse will be able to obtain a court order dispensing with your consent and you can also expect the court to be very upset with your refusal and award costs against you.

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