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bis.

"It's always available for those who have their prescription," she said, adding that she prefers the use of cannabis to treat a variety of ailments rather than using a chemical pill. "It's a flower. It's not a pill produced on an assembly line."

But Halton Region's health department doesn't share the same sentiments.

Elizabeth Kosturik, communications specialist at Halton Region, said there are both short and long-term effects of using cannabis, and the only way to completely avoid the risks associated with cannabis use is to not use it.

She cited the following as short-term risks: anxiety, fear or panic, confusion, decreased blood pressure (can cause dizziness or fainting), impaired ability to concentrate, focus or remember things, increased heart rate (increasing the risk

"It's a flower. It's not a pill produced on an assembly line."

- Michele Parrotta

of heart attack in those with heart conditions), reduced ability to react quickly, sleepiness and paranoia and/or delusional thoughts.

The long-term effects she listed as: bronchitis, lung infections, chronic long-term cough and risk of addiction.

There is also an increased risk of developing chronic psychosis disorders, including schizophrenia, she said.

Just as there is no safe level of second-hand tobacco smoke exposure, either indoors or outdoors, there are similar concerns around cannabis smoke. The second-

hand smoke produced when smoking cannabis is considered as harmful to a nonsmoker as cigarette smoke.

On the other hand, Parrotta said there are many ways to reap the benefits of CBD, without smoking.

Vaporizing heats the cannabis so that the THC and CBD benefits can be activated, whereas smoking combusts the plant, resulting in smoke, tar and other debris entering the lungs. Health Canada suggests vaporizing as a healthier way to consume medicine.

Licensed cannabis producers offer a wide

range of products: dry herb/flower, extracts/oils, gel capsules, sublingual sprays, powder and topical creams.

The province has also aligned cannabis consumption rules with the restrictions set out in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017. Under the Act, smoking and vaping cannabis is strictly prohibited near schools, children's playgrounds, hospitals and child care facilities - among other areas.

Any form of recreational cannabis consumption is prohibited in motor vehicles and boats.

Kari Veno, senior communications consultant with Halton Healthcare, said cannabis has not increased visits to their hospitals (Milton District Hospital, Georgetown Hospital and Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital).

"At this point in time, following the legalization of recreational cannabis on Oct. 17, we have not seen an increase in cannabis-related emergency

room visits at our hospitals," she said.

As for Canadian Blood Services, it's business as usual - all blood is screened to ensure its safety.

There is one question asking donors if they have used marijuana, however that doesn't mean a donor isn't eligible.

"Individuals who use cannabis or marijuana may be eligible to donate, however, any evidence of intoxication or inability to give an informed consent will prevent you from donating."

Since October, one thing that changes because of the legalization are stronger laws to deter and detect those who drive while impaired by alcohol and drugs, including cannabis.

As of June 21, 2018, as a result of Bill C-46, police can now also demand a sample of oral fluid on approved drug screening equipment at the roadside. A drug screener has now been approved for

use as an additional tool for law enforcement.

A positive result on an oral fluid drug screener is strongly suggestive of recent cannabis and recent cocaine use.

The government of Canada passed the new law because it cites impaired driving as the leading criminal cause of death and injury in Canada.

Kosturik said the region has received 21 inquiries about cannabis since Oct. 17 including requests for information that relates to health, by-law, retail locations and selling or purchasing product.

Next week: Information for parents: How to approach your kids about the topic of cannabis.

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STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

While there's still a stigma surrounding the use of cannabis it's up to individuals to choose whether the benefits outweigh the risks.

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