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## California Cannabis for pets? Not yet . . .

By Mona Miller, DVM



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<https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2016/hq081116.shtml>. This position statement includes a paragraph that states: "DEA fully supports expanding research into the potential medical utility of marijuana and its chemical constituents."

From a medical perspective, it is quite possible that cannabidiol chemicals can be used to alleviate a variety of conditions, including severe pain from cancer or arthritis, appetite stimulation, anti-cancer effects, anti-inflammatory effects, seizure activity and anxiety. It appears that the ratios of THC to CBD may be very important in the specific medical action.

How safe is marijuana? Marijuana toxicity has long been a component of veterinary practice, when dogs or other animals have ingested THC-laden foods. More toxicity has been seen in recent years, since the legalization of medical marijuana in California as well as recreational marijuana in nearby states. The vast majority of dogs who suffer from THC toxicity appear as expected - stoned, lethargic, depressed, not eating, wobbly and off-balance. Some can become urine incontinent. Approximately 25 percent can become hyperactive and agitated. More severe signs include disorientation, low body temperature, low heart rate, and tremors. Signs can be seen 30 minutes after ingestion, and can last up to 72 hours. During this time, dogs may require intensive care support, such as intravenous fluids and in-hospital monitoring. While death is extremely rare, there have been two reported cases. Furthermore, there can be associated toxicities of chocolate, butter or dough if the pet has ingested THC contained in any of these ingredients. More information on marijuana toxicity can be found at <http://www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&S=0&C=0&A=1382>.

One of the most important things to understand about this discussion is that at this time, there is no question - it is illegal for veterinarians in California to incorporate cannabis into practice, as overseen by the Veterinary Medical Board. This means that vets cannot legally recommend, approve, administer, dispense or prescribe cannabinoid products. A veterinarian who engages in these activities is not only breaking federal law (unauthorized use of their DEA license) but also state law.

In order to further understand and allow discussion about the possible benefits of using cannabis in pets, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine is conducting an anonymous survey for pet owners. This is a valid survey, with goals of identifying the types of species receiving cannabis products, owners' perceptions of benefits and to potentiate scientific research. The survey is titled "Pet Owner Hemp and Cannabis Survey."

With the approaching date of Jan. 1, when recreational marijuana becomes legal in California, there is intensified discussion among pet owners and veterinarians about the possibilities of using marijuana in animals. Much of the information I impart below may incur some response among readers, which further illustrates the dynamic nature of this conversation.

The topic of veterinary medical use of marijuana is complicated, in part due to federal and state regulatory agencies and in part due to the complexity of the plant itself. Marijuana, also known as cannabis, has two important components to it: THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), which causes psychoactive effects, and CBD (Cannabidiol), which potentially has a multitude of medicinal effects. CBD has no psychotropic effect, and is comprised of over 100 different chemical compounds. Technically, all parts of cannabis contain THC, although different amounts are found in different parts of the plant.

THC is designated by the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration Department of Justice as a controlled substance in Schedule 1 (which also includes heroin, mescaline, LSD and Ecstasy, for example). Schedule 1 controlled drugs have a high potential for abuse, lack acceptable safety criteria and do not meet criteria for accepted medical use in the United States. Veterinarians do not have Schedule 1 clearance.

Further information about the DEA's position statements about marijuana and industrial hemp can be found at

More information and the link to the survey can be found at  
<http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whatsnew/article.cfm?id=4015>.

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