


# Episode 124: A conversation on cannabis in Minnesota

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New Minnesota laws allows cannabis possession as of August 1.



**KINDRA PETERSON:** Hello everyone, and welcome to In The Know, the podcast covering the latest events and news at the University of Minnesota. I'm your host, Kindra Peterson.

For this episode, we turn to a recent change in Minnesota statutes, where on August 1, 2023, possession of recreational cannabis for adults was officially legalized within the state. Today, we will discuss the essential details of the law, as well as the potential impacts it could create across the state. Joining me today to discuss the details of the law is my producer, Kaylie Sirovy.

**KAYLIE SIROVY:** Thank you for having me! This is a little different from our regularly scheduled program, but as this is the last episode for the summer, we thought of doing something different. Now, I know that the age limit for cannabis consumption is 21, which is important to note as we are primarily focused on a college campus. However, what are the restrictions on possession?

**PETERSON:** Starting on August 1, Minnesotans who are 21 or older can possess up to two pounds of marijuana at home, and may possess or transport up to two ounces of cannabis flower, eight grams of cannabis concentrates, and edible cannabis products containing up to 800 milligrams of THC. So restrictions remain, but adult recreational use and possession has been legalized.

**SIROVY:** So this means that a variety of cannabis products are now legal, correct?

**PETERSON:** Exactly. The law states that, “all types of cannabis flower, cannabis products, lower-potency hemp edibles, and hemp-derived consumer products” are approved, so you can expect to see the THC-infused beverages and candies in the coming months, in addition to more traditional cannabis products.

**SIROVY:** One question that’s sure to be on many students’ minds is, if they’re from out of state, can they still purchase marijuana in Minnesota?

**PETERSON:** There’s good news. As long as they are over 21 with a valid driver’s license, they can purchase cannabis products at a licensed store. However, an important note from the state about the law is that retail sales for adult use cannabis in Minnesota won’t begin until the beginning of 2025. So, if you see a retailer of specifically adult use cannabis before then, it’s unlikely to be legitimate or licensed by the state, though I will say medical and lower-potency hemp edibles will continue to be sold.

**SIROVY:** That is a good heads up. What are the other details that Minnesotans need to know while adjusting to legalization?

**PETERSON:** So first, the bill calls for the, “automatic expungement of petty misdemeanor and misdemeanor marijuana convictions” and will create a board to review higher level marijuana-related crimes, with the potential of expunging these crimes. According to Minnesota’s Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, an estimated 66,000 misdemeanor marijuana cases will be eligible for automatic expungement.

Secondly, cannabis products will receive an additional 10% state tax, similar to Minnesota alcohol sales. At the time of the law’s creation, the Minnesota House anticipated a \$24.4 million annual revenue stream as a result of marijuana taxation and licensing fees. So where is all of this money going? It will be distributed between local governments, the Departments

of Health and Public Safety, it will create grants for the cannabis industry in Minnesota, as well as be funneled to the University of Minnesota to create a Center for Cannabis Research at the School of Public Health.

**SIROVY:** So we know that most students these days are also working when not at school. Are there any changes to the drug testing policies for private employers in the U.S., or can most still look forward to pre-employment and random drug testing for cannabis?

**PETERSON:** So specifically in Minnesota, with few exceptions, pre-employment drug screens focused on marijuana will be discontinued, along with ongoing or random cannabis tests for employees. However, just as with alcohol use, if cannabis use is suspected on the job, the private employer will retain the right to conduct a drug test. Additionally, for individuals in a safety-related job like firefighters, peace officers, those who work with children or vulnerable adults, etc, or a federal position, the drug and alcohol testing requirements that occurred before the new law was passed will still stand.

**SIROVY:** So now that we understand the facts of the law, is there anything we should know about how it might impact the public?

**PETERSON:** I've learned a lot about the new cannabis law, but these next questions might be more for Ryan Steel, a former University of Minnesota grad student and current visiting lecturer in sociology at the University of Richmond.

**RYAN STEEL:** Research has consistently found in states where marijuana is legalized for either medical or recreational purposes, that there's generally a reduction in negative attitudes toward marijuana and usually a concurrent reduction in user reports of stigma.

This more generally correlates with what we see in the broader shifts in attitudes towards marijuana in the U.S. as a whole. So in many ways, rather than state policy leading public opinion, it's almost like the states, like Minnesota, are actually catching up to public opinion.

**PETERSON:** What about in relation to public health? Could the act of legalizing marijuana create a sociological impact in this area?

**STEEL:** Research that has indicated that sort of normalizing marijuana use as a healthy form of recreational consumption, it has a pretty clear correlation to a reduction in less healthy forms of consumption, like alcohol and tobacco, and so I think in that respect, marijuana legalization has had a significant impact on how people view consumption practices in general.

**PETERSON:** With a large portion of the law focusing on the expungement of certain marijuana related crimes with the intent of ensuring equity in the law and in the future of Minnesota, I wanted to know how the new law could alter marijuana prosecution in

Minnesota.

**STEEL:** As late as 2020, Minnesota had one of the largest black/white marijuana related arrest disparities in the U.S. with a ratio of about 5.37 to 1. Marijuana criminal charges may largely disappear for the vast majority of potential cases, and these will largely become civil charges, tickets, things like that and this bill was purportedly written and publicized in a way that is supposed to be addressing sort of these racially disproportionate harms of marijuana criminalization, and so I think this is going to be really important to keep an eye on.

**PETERSON:** As the Minnesota Daily operates on a college campus, a lot of questions around youth use of marijuana have arisen after the passage of the bill. Is there a significant risk of underage use or possession?

**STEEL:** Different research projects coming out of both California and Colorado which weren't connected, but both similarly found that the legalization of recreational marijuana didn't increase youth reports about their use of marijuana, with one even finding that it's slightly decreased reported use. Perhaps it's because when your parents and grandparents are using it, it kind of loses its cool factor.

And I think when it comes to the question of college students though, college students, I mean let's be honest, college students have been regularly using marijuana for a long time in the U.S. Legalization provides safe, legal access to marijuana, actually decreases the potential harms of marijuana use. Right, so even if it potentially might increase or decrease the use, the harms associated with that use tend to diminish.

**PETERSON:** Now, what are the consequences for cannabis usage for those under 21?

**STEEL:** I'm unsure about how these violations will be handled as it's written in the law and this will get fleshed out in some of the administrative rules, but I don't think that the focus of enforcement will be on possession. So most college students, 21 or not, will likely not have to deal with law enforcement in the same way as prior to August 1 of this year.

**PETERSON:** And what about for the out-of-state students, could this legalization create political tensions in their home states where marijuana is not legal?

**STEEL:** I think for college students who have access to legal marijuana in Minnesota and then return to states like Iowa or Nebraska, where marijuana remains criminalized for the general population, perhaps, I don't know, this glaring discrepancy of justice across these arbitrary lines will increase the political push to reform these laws.

**PETERSON:** We'll have to wait and see exactly how this new law impacts Minnesota's political relationships with other states, and how it affects other topics such as youth cannabis usage and racial equity. In the meantime, those of us here at the Minnesota Daily

will continue to do our best to keep you 'in the know' on the most important issues facing our University of Minnesota campus community.

This episode was written by Kindra Peterson and produced by Kaylie Sirovy. As always, we appreciate you listening in and feel free to leave us an email at [podcasting@mndaily.com](mailto:podcasting@mndaily.com) with comments or questions. I'm Kindra, and this is In The Know.