

News story: Cannabis-derived medicinal products to be made available on prescription

The Home Secretary decided to reschedule these products after receiving advice from experts during the two-part review he commissioned on June 19. It means that senior clinicians will be able to prescribe the medicines to patients with an exceptional clinical need.

The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Medicines and Health products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will now develop a clear definition of what constitutes a cannabis-derived medicinal product so they can be rescheduled and prescribed. Only products meeting this definition will be rescheduled. Other forms of cannabis will be kept under strict controls and will not be available on prescription.

In the meantime, clinicians will still be able to apply to the independent expert panel on behalf of patients wishing to access these products. The Home Secretary also confirmed today that all licence fees for applications made to the panel will be waived, and no fees will be charged in respect of applications which have already been granted.

The government is clear that today's announcement does not pave the way towards legalising cannabis for recreational use. The penalties for unauthorised supply and possession will remain unchanged.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Recent cases involving sick children made it clear to me that our position on cannabis-related medicinal products was not satisfactory.

That is why we launched a review and set up an expert panel to advise on licence applications in exceptional circumstances.

Following advice from two sets of independent advisers, I have taken the decision to reschedule cannabis-derived medicinal products – meaning they will be available on prescription.

This will help patients with an exceptional clinical need, but is in no way a first step to the legalisation of cannabis for recreational use.

In the first part of the review commissioned by the Home Secretary, the Chief Medical Advisor, Professor Dame Sally Davies, concluded that there is evidence that medicinal cannabis has therapeutic benefits.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) carried out the second part of the review, considering the appropriate schedule for cannabis-derived medicinal products, based on the balance of harms and public health requirements.

The ACMD recommended that such products meeting a clear definition of what constitutes a cannabis-derived medicinal product should be placed in Schedule 2 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. It agreed that there is evidence of medicinal benefits from some of these products in certain circumstances and clinicians in the UK should therefore have the option to prescribe cannabis-derived medicinal products for their patients.

In line with the ACMD's recommendations, DHSC and the Home Office will develop additional frameworks and clinical guidelines to ensure that cannabis-derived medicinal products can be prescribed safely to patients but cannot be traded illicitly.