

Why does cannabis potency matter?

Of the many people who use cannabis world wide,, very few understand the increase in its potency over time. Cannabis has changed dramatically since the 1970s. New methods of production such as hydroponic cultivation have increased the potency and the negative effects of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the most psychoactive of chemical substances found in marijuana. It is important to understand cannabis potency because of its link to health problems including mental health.

The amount of THC in a cannabis sample is generally used as a measure of cannabis potency. One of the most comprehensive studies was conducted in 2004 by the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and concluded that a modest increase in aggregate cannabis potency had occurred, possibly related to the use of intensive indoor cultivation methods. The authors noted that THC content nonetheless varied widely.

While the United Kingdom Home Office study in 2008 found little change: from a median potency of sinsemilla cannabis of 14% among samples in 2004/5 compared to 15% in 2008, long-term increases have been reported in the United States with an average potency of 10% in 2008.

Multiple methodological issues have been raised, which affect the capacity to generate comparable data and infer trends. Important variables to be considered include the phytochemistry; type of cannabis product; cultivation method; sampling; and stability.



Plant part used: The secretion of THC is most abundant in the flowering heads and surrounding leaves. The amount of resin secreted is influenced by environmental conditions during growth (light, temperature and humidity), sex of the plant, and time of harvest. The THC content varies between parts of the plant: from 10-12 % in flowers, 1-2 % in leaves, 0.1-0.3 % in stalks, to less than 0.03 % in the roots.

Stability: THC is converted to cannabinol on exposure to air and light. This process reduces the THC concentration, especially in old samples which have not been stored under suitable conditions (such as a dark, cool place).

It is believed that claims of increases in potency of cannabis preparations confiscated over a period of 18 years in the United States¹⁰ may have been affected by the stability of THC in old samples. Only through examining these factors can we have a more systematic, scientific and comparable assessment of cannabis potency between places and over time.



Issue No. 14
July 2009

Gortalowry House, 94 Church St, Cookstown,
BT80 8HX
Telephone: 028 8676 3388
Email: info@cookstownhelp.com

TIPSA Photo Competition

Can you Picture Yourself with a New iPod?

In the tradition of providing diversionary activities over the summer months, TIPSA has decided to do things slightly different this year. Rather than the normal drama workshops which normal happen around this time, the project is running a photography competition for under 18s living in the Cookstown and Magherafelt council areas.

The theme of the competition will be "Alternative Highs" and it will be up to the photographer to decide how to interpret this title. Obviously the more imaginative the interpretation, the easier it will be to impress the judges. So there will be no point in contacting the TIPSA office for ideas as to what to take- part of the challenge will be in deciding what you want to capture.

All entries must be accompanied by an official entry form which will be available on the TIPSA website along with a copy of the rules. TIPSA cannot emphasise hard enough the importance of reading and understanding these rules before entry.

Any submissions that do not comply with the guidelines and rules will not be passed on for judging.

One overall winner will receive an iPod, but there are other opportunities for recognising the quality of other entries.

It is hoped that the best of the photos will be exhibited in Cookstown and Magherafelt at some TIPSA organised events and, if possible, it is hoped to use some of the pictures in another TIPSA calendar, dependent on funding.

All entry forms must be co-signed by a parent/ guardian and are available on the TIPSA website.

Keep checking the latest news page on www.tipsa.co.uk and remember to make yourself or whoever is entering aware of the term and conditions for taking part.

For more details such as closing date, how to submit and the all important forms, go to the website or contact the TIPSA office via phone or e-mail.

New Face in the TIPSA Office

Eugene and Marty would like to welcome our new temporary volunteer who is going to be helping TIPSA with some admin tasks over the next 13 weeks or so. James Mallon has come to us through the Volunteer Bureau, and it is hoped TIPSA will be able to provide him with some valuable working experience, while relieving some of the admin burden from the co-ordinators. We hope this will be a useful time for James, so if you hear a strange voice on the end of the phone when you call us or get e-mails signed "James" then you will know who that is.

Some "Legal High" Substances to be Banned

Before her resignation UK Home Secretary Jacqui Smith announced plans to ban two "legal" highs and a range of anabolic steroids, the latter in preparation for the London 2012 Olympics.

GBL, an industrial solvent that synthesizes into GHB in the body and BZP (or "PEP pills") are to be banned, following a small number of deaths linked to the use of the substances, and a ECMDA report into BZP. 24 anabolic steroids are to be added to the list of 54 other anabolic steroid and 5 growth hormones already banned in Britain.

While he has not made an specific announcements, it is believed that Smith's successor, Alan Johnson will probably continue pushing through the legislation.

Summer Scheme Support

TIPSA have been asked to help out a number of local summer schemes for young people throughout July and August by providing interactive sessions looking at alcohol and other drugs and the issues that surround them.

Eugene and Marty have been happy to accommodate those that are within our area and have been directing requests from further afield to the relevant providers of education and prevention in the relevant parts of the country.

However if you are running something for young people this summer, and want TIPSA to be part of that experience give us a shout- we can tailor fun and informal sessions around your other activities and best of all we do not charge for our services.

If you are interested get in touch as soon as

TIPSA Over the Summer Period.

While it is traditional for a lot of work to slow down and stop over the July and August period, TIPSA would like to make it clear that apart from the 13th and 14th July, the TIPSA office will be open all throughout the summer. As already noted the coordinators are working alongside a number of summer schemes but even if they are out delivering, James should be available to take calls, deal with enquiries etc between 9am and 3:30pm each day except Friday (9am to 2pm) and at least one of the coordinators will be in the office until 5pm. In the unlikely event of no one being available leave a voicemail and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

TIPSA's Summer Tip

While we are expecting warm temperatures and sunshine this summer, remember that while a cool drink can help people feel relaxed and add to their enjoyment of any time off they may have, alcohol can dehydrate and drinking too much also makes it more likely that sun worshippers may fall asleep leading to all sorts of problems from sun burn to heat stroke. Drink wisely and have a great summer.

Strengthening Families Course- Expression of Interest

TIPSA is looking at the possibility of running a Strengthening Families 10-14 course, an 8 week programme that works with parents/guardians and young people in looking at issues that address behaviour, and in particular risk and protective factors.

This is a very resource intensive course and requires a lot of commitment from participants so TIPSA want to make sure it is viable to run and in what format we should deliver it.

If you, or any family you may know could possibly benefit from such a course contact the office, and depending on response, we will try and run with it at a time, location etc that suits as many people as possible.

Please note that as a pilot programme, this can only be run in the Cookstown area. However depending on uptake, interest etc future courses may be run elsewhere within the TIPSA catchment area.

TIPSA Blast Off with Relaunch in Maghera

Mid-Ulster based drugs education and prevention project TIPSA have run a successful relaunch event in Maghera. The evening was organised to mark TIPSA's successful tender applications to HSC Public Health Agency / Northern Drugs and Alcohol Co-ordination Team which has allowed the organisation to widen its remit and expand the services offered.

The event took place in St Lurach's church hall in the town, and was organised with the assistance of Oscar Spence and the Maghera Parish Caring Association. Both TIPSA project coordinators made a presentation to the assembled crowd that highlighted the history of the project, how it had developed, the ethos and models of practice behind the work, examples of the work done and what the future holds.

Martin McCann, TIPSA Young People's project co-ordinator explained how TIPSA's services have expanded to deal with not just those aged 17 and under but also with adults deemed vulnerable.

He said "Since it's inception in 2003, TIPSA has always played a role in providing education and prevention for young people, and it is a role we have relished and developed. "

"However we cannot simply take young people's alcohol and drug misuse in isolation, and we also need to ensure those who are vulnerable in our community, be they teenager or adult, also get the same opportunities to access services."

The co-ordinators also fielded questions and comments from the floor and what emerged was a revitalised project that already has a lot of support throughout the Mid-Ulster area, and it is hoped that this can be built on to ensure anyone in any community can avail of the services. For more information on TIPSA or to find out what services they can provide contact them on 028 8676 3388, e-mail, info@cookstownhelp.com or check out the