

Curaleaf Report: Online and unregulated cannabis poses serious health risks with mould, lead, and synthetic cannabinoids detected

- Illegal cannabis sales through unregulated online retailers have increased 50% in past two years
- 73% of the illegal online market is driven by those seeking relief from health conditions
- Tests show illegal cannabis in the UK contains harmful substances such as mould, lead, and synthetic cannabinoids, posing serious health threats to consumers
- Curaleaf International calls for public education, stronger enforcement, and regulatory reform to tackle the illegal market and safeguard consumers

LONDON, Oct. 24, 2024 /PRNewswire/ -- [Curaleaf International](#), a global leader in medical cannabis, is urging the UK government to take immediate action against the rapidly growing online illicit cannabis market, which is allowing street cannabis to be sold from unregulated and unpoliced websites and platforms.

Curaleaf's latest report reveals that illegal online cannabis sales via the open and dark web have risen by 50% in the past two years, and increased by 67% across open web retailers.

This is largely being driven by consumers buying illegal cannabis to seek relief from health conditions like chronic pain, insomnia, and anxiety (73% of online purchasers) - many of whom could be eligible for legally prescribed medical cannabis.

Curaleaf's report, developed in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University, also found that illegal cannabis is often contaminated with dangerous substances such as mould, lead, and synthetic cannabinoids, posing severe health risks to the 1.8 million people in the UK who use the product to self-treat medical conditions. This unregulated market not only endangers public health but also undermines the legal, medical cannabis industry, which adheres to strict quality and safety standards.

Despite dangers including respiratory issues, neurological damage, and increased risk of infection, nearly one in five (17%) cannabis consumers mistakenly believe illegal cannabis is safer than regulated medical cannabis or don't know the difference, highlighting an urgent need for public education to tackle the illicit market and safeguard consumers.

Curaleaf International advocates for a holistic reform strategy that encompasses:

- **Tightened Regulation of Illegal Channels:** Strengthening enforcement against unlicensed online sales and dark web activity to protect consumers from unregulated and potentially dangerous products.
- **Public Awareness Initiatives:** Launching comprehensive campaigns to educate the public on the risks associated with unregulated cannabis products and the advantages of the existing legal medical cannabis market. These campaigns will ensure patients make informed choices based on reliable information about regulated medical cannabis, which meets stringent safety and quality standards, unlike illicit products.
- **Policy Changes to Improve Patient Access to Medicine:** Simple regulatory and policy changes could significantly improve patient access to medical cannabis. For instance, enabling electronic prescribing of cannabis medicines would reduce the bureaucracy imposed on doctors and improve the efficiency of medicine dispensing.
- **Expanded Research into Medical Cannabis:** Promoting further clinical research to unlock the full therapeutic potential of cannabis. As a leader in the industry, Curaleaf International is already pioneering studies to advance the understanding of how medical cannabis affects patients with a range of diagnosed medical conditions, where other treatments have not provided relief.

Juan Martinez, Head of Curaleaf International, stated: "While the online market for illicit cannabis is growing year on year and remains completely unregulated, the UK already has a legal medical cannabis market in place, which adheres to rigorous safety and quality standards. Our research has found alarmingly high levels of contamination in illegal cannabis, putting consumers' health at serious risk. If the UK government is truly committed to safeguarding public health and supporting legitimate businesses, it must do more to improve patient access to regulated medical cannabis and enforce stricter regulations on illegal sales. This includes educating the public on the benefits of regulated cannabis products and enhanced policing of internet search engines and service providers. By curbing the illicit market and expanding access to legal, regulated options, we can better protect vulnerable individuals and dismantle illegal operations."

Boris Jordan, Chairman and CEO at Curaleaf Inc, added: "The findings in this new report echo our concerns across the globe, and highlight serious risks to patients in the UK. Similar testing done previously in the US found contaminated products in illegal dispensaries, and this is an issue that weighs on all of us in the industry. Without controlled and legal access to tested, regulated cannabis, patients and consumers are left vulnerable to extreme health risks. Lawmakers around the world must act now to enforce laws against the illicit market and widen access to legal, regulated cannabis products."

About Curaleaf International

Curaleaf International is shaping the future of cannabis through its commitment to research and product excellence. Powered by

a strong presence at all stages of the supply chain, its unique distribution network throughout Europe, Canada and Australasia brings together pioneering research with cutting-edge cultivation, extraction, and production. Amidst a rapid growth trajectory, the emphasis on quality and expertise aims to ensure the delivery of safe and legal cannabis.

Curaleaf International's network includes a clinic, pharmacy, and laboratory in the UK; cultivation and processing facilities in Portugal; an EU-GMP processing, quality assurance and research site in Spain; Four20 Pharma wholesaler and distributor in Germany; a Polish wholesaler; and the EU-GMP producer Northern Green Canada.

Curaleaf International is part of Curaleaf Holdings, Inc., a publicly listed business and the world's largest cannabis company.

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