

NYSVMS Position Statement on Marijuana and Marijuana-derived Products in Companion Animals

Adopted by the Board of Directors, November 30, 2018

The New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYSVMS) recognizes the interest of companion animal owners and veterinarians regarding the potential benefits of marijuana therapies for a variety of animal medical conditions. Similar to human medicine, there is extremely limited data on the medical benefits and side effects of marijuana products in companion animals. There are no FDA-approved uses of marijuana in food-producing animals; this position statement applies only to companion animals.

Veterinarians have an obligation to provide companion animal owners with complete education in regard to the potential risks and benefits of marijuana products in animals. The following points are the foundation for full understanding and disclosure regarding the use of marijuana and marijuana derived products in animals:

Marijuana

- Marijuana (*Cannabis Sativa*) contains a large number of chemicals known as cannabinoids, with tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD) being the two main cannabinoids of medical interest at this time.
- THC is known to cause psychoactive effects in people (“high”) whereas CBD does not have psychoactive properties (although it can still affect the central nervous system).
- Vertebrates have an endocannabinoid system consisting of a number of cannabinoid receptors, with CB1 and CB2 being the most extensively characterized to date.
- The endocannabinoid system mediates a variety of processes both in the central nervous system and the periphery.

Use in animals

Our scientific and medical understanding of the pharmacology and physiology of marijuana products is incomplete and evolving. NYSVMS supports marijuana availability for research to determine efficacy and safety of marijuana use in companion animals.

- To date, there are no known scientifically proven therapeutic uses for cannabinoids in companion animals.
- Any animal being treated with a marijuana product should be closely monitored for signs of therapeutic effect and/or toxicity.

- Preclinical studies in rodent models suggest potential therapeutic benefits in other species, including humans and companion animals.
- The effects of marijuana products can be very different in people than in animals.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that an increasing number of companion animal owners are asking veterinarians for their recommendations on marijuana use for the treatment of a variety of conditions, including adjuncts in chronic pain management and cancer therapy.
- Anecdotally, veterinarians report that some owners are administering marijuana products to their companion animals due to frustration from results of more conventional therapy.
- The number of animals, especially dogs and cats, being seen by veterinarians for marijuana intoxication has dramatically increased over the last several years as marijuana has become more widely available and/or the willingness of companion animal owners to disclose marijuana ingestion has increased. Ingestion of edible marijuana products is of particular concern in animals due to the higher concentrations of THC. Companion animal death from overdose has been reported.

Any discussion regarding a specific marijuana product as part of a companion animal's therapeutic regimen should be consistent with a valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship.

AVMA

The American Veterinary Medical Association does not have a position statement on the use of marijuana and marijuana products and offers this advice:

- Veterinarians making treatment decisions must use sound clinical judgment and current medical information, and must be in compliance with federal, state and local laws and regulations.
- Medications do not necessarily work the same in animals as they do people, which underscores the value of extensive studies showing safety and efficacy, and also the value of the FDA's approval process for drugs used in animals.
- There are possibilities of adverse reactions, including toxicities and failure to treat the clinical condition at hand.

Resources

Guidance from the American Veterinary Medical Association: <http://atwork.avma.org/2013/07/15/a-sign-of-the-times-medical-marijuana-use-and-veterinary-medicine/>

Guidance from the National Institute of Drug Abuse regarding marijuana products in people:
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana-medicine>

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