

# Czechs award first licence to import medical marijuana

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The Czech health ministry said Tuesday it had awarded its first licence to import marijuana, months after the European Union member legalised the drug for medical purposes.

Czech firm Elkoplast Slusovice will import three kilogrammes (seven pounds) of [marijuana](#) from the Netherlands next month, said Deputy Health Minister Martin Plisek, adding that the license was allocated on Monday.

Marijuana has been legal since April in the Czech Republic as a prescription-only [drug](#) to alleviate the pain of patients suffering from cancer, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and other serious illnesses.

Officials prefer to first import the drug, before the State Institute for Drug Control starts issuing licences to local growers.

The Czech Republic provides some of the most liberal access to soft drugs in Europe: people holding up to 15 grammes (0.5 ounces) of marijuana or growing up to five plants of cannabis risk just a small fine.

That often attracts smokers from other countries such as neighbouring Poland, where tougher laws apply.

Medical marijuana is legal in several other European countries, along with 21 US states and Israel.

But the new Czech law, which does not allow [health insurance coverage](#) for marijuana, also comes with a slew of restrictions, including the requirement that users be listed on an electronic registry.

Officials also keep tabs on illegal growers and "grow shops" selling hemp seeds and marijuana paraphernalia.

Earlier this month police charged 45 people with drug-dealing after raiding scores of the shops across the country.

Czech cannabis users numbered around nine percent of the population of 10.5 million people last year, according to an annual report by the national drug monitor NMSDDZ released Tuesday.

That was down from 15 percent in 2008.

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