

New year brings broad pot legalization to California

January 1 2018, by Brian Melley



In this Dec. 29, 2017, photo, Khalil Moutawakkil, co-founder and CEO of KindPeoples, a marijuana dispensary, looks at different marijuana plants on display in his store in Santa Cruz, Calif. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a stronger-than-normal whiff of marijuana as America's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the state's first legal retail pot sales. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

The arrival of the new year in California brought with it broad

legalization of marijuana, a much-anticipated change that comes two decades after the state was the first to allow pot for medical use.

The nation's most populous state joins a growing list of other states, and the nation's capital, where so-called recreational marijuana is permitted even though the federal government continues to classify pot as a controlled substance, like heroin and LSD.

Pot is now legal in California for adults 21 and older, and individuals can grow up to six plants and possess as much as an ounce of the drug.

But finding a retail outlet to buy non-medical pot in California won't be easy, at least initially. Only about 90 businesses received state licenses to open on New Year's Day. They are concentrated in San Diego, Santa Cruz, the San Francisco Bay Area and the Palm Springs area.

Los Angeles and San Francisco are among the many cities where recreational pot will not be available right away because local regulations were not approved in time to start issuing city licenses needed to get state permits. Meanwhile, Fresno, Bakersfield and Riverside are among the communities that have adopted laws forbidding recreational marijuana sales.



In this Dec. 29, 2017, photo, Khalil Moutawakkil, co-founder and CEO of KindPeoples, poses for a portrait with some marijuana plants in his dispensary in Santa Cruz, Calif. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a stronger-than-normal whiff of marijuana as America's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the state's first legal retail pot sales. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

Just after midnight, some Californians were raising blunts instead of champagne glasses.

Johnny Hernandez, a tattoo artist from Modesto, celebrated New Year's Eve by smoking "Happy New Year blunts" with his cousins.

"This is something we've all been waiting for," he said. "It is something that can help so many people and there's no reason why we should not be sharing that."

Hernandez said he hoped the legalization of recreational marijuana

would help alleviate the remaining stigma some still believe surrounds marijuana use.



In this Dec. 29, 2017, photo, Khalil Moutawakkil, co-founder and CEO of KindPeoples, arranges a clothing line for sale in his marijuana dispensary store in Santa Cruz, Calif. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a stronger-than-normal whiff of marijuana as America's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the state's first legal retail pot sales. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

"People might actually realize weed isn't bad. It helps a lot of people," he said.

For those who worked for this day, the shift also offered joyful relief.

"We're thrilled," said Khalil Moutawakkil, founder of KindPeoples, which grows and sells weed in Santa Cruz. "We can talk about the good,

the bad and the ugly of the specific regulations, but at the end of the day it's a giant step forward, and we'll have to work out the kinks as we go."

The state banned "loco-weed" in 1913, according to a history by the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, the pot advocacy group known as NORML. The first attempt to undo that by voter initiative in 1972 failed, but three years later felony possession of less than an ounce was downgraded to a misdemeanor.



In this Dec. 29, 2017, photo, various kinds of marijuana strains are displayed at the KindPeoples dispensary in Santa Cruz, Calif. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a stronger-than-normal whiff of marijuana as America's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the state's first legal retail pot sales. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

In 1996, over the objections of law enforcement, President Clinton's

drug czar and three former presidents, California voters approved marijuana for medicinal purposes. Twenty years later, voters approved legal recreational use and gave the state a year to write regulations for a legal market that would open in 2018.

Today, 29 states have adopted medical [marijuana laws](#). In 2012, Colorado and Washington became the first states to legalize recreational marijuana. Since then, five more states have passed recreational marijuana laws, including Massachusetts, where retail sales are scheduled to begin in July.

Even with other states as models, the next year is expected to be a bumpy one in California as more shops open and more stringent regulations take effect on the strains known as Sweet Skunk, Trainwreck and Russian Assassin.

The California Police Chiefs Association, which opposed the 2016 ballot measure, remains concerned about stoned drivers, the risk to young people and the cost of policing the new rules in addition to an existing black market.



In this Dec. 29, 2017, photo, marijuana plants are shown at the KindPeoples dispensary in Santa Cruz, Calif. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a stronger-than-normal whiff of marijuana as America's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the state's first legal retail pot sales. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

"There's going to be a public-health cost and a public-safety cost enforcing these new laws and regulations," said Jonathan Feldman, a legislative advocate for the chiefs. "It remains to be seen if this can balance itself out."

At first, pot shops will be able to sell marijuana harvested without full regulatory controls. But eventually, the state will require extensive testing for potency, pesticides and other contaminants. A program to track all pot from seed to sale will be phased in, along with other protections such as childproof containers.

Jamie Garzot, founder of the 530 Cannabis shop in Northern California's Shasta Lake, said she's concerned that when the current crop dries up, there will be a shortage of marijuana that meets state regulations. Her outlet happens to be close to some of California's most productive [marijuana](#)-growing areas, but most of the surrounding counties will not allow cultivation that could supply her.

"Playing in the gray market is not an option," Garzot said. "California produces more cannabis than any state in the nation, but going forward, if it's not from a state-licensed source, I can't put it on my shelf. If I choose to do so, I run the risk of losing my license."



This Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017 photo Triple J's mini cannabis cigarettes in decorative metal containers are displayed at MedMen a marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a familiar scent in greater-than-normal concentrations. A whiff of marijuana will likely be in the air

as the nation's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the first legal retail sales of pot in the state. The historic day comes more than two decades after California paved the way for legal weed by passing the first medical marijuana law in the U.S., though other states were quicker to allow recreational use of the drug. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)

In 2016, the state produced an estimated 13.5 million pounds of pot, and 80 percent was illegally shipped out of state, according to a report prepared for the state by ERA Economics, an environmental and agricultural consulting firm. Of the remaining 20 percent, only a quarter was sold legally for medicinal purposes.

That robust black market is expected to continue to thrive, particularly as taxes and fees raise the cost of retail pot by as much as 70 percent.



In this Dec. 22, 2017 photo, Dale Gieringer of NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) poses for photos at his house in Berkeley, Calif. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a familiar scent in greater-than-normal concentrations. A whiff of marijuana will likely be in the air as the nation's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the first legal retail sales of pot in the state. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)



In this Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017, file photo pedestrians walk past MedMen a marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a familiar scent in greater-than-normal concentrations. A whiff of marijuana will likely be in the air as the nation's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the first legal retail sales of pot in the state. The historic day comes more than two decades after California paved the way for legal weed by passing the first medical marijuana law in the U.S., though other states were quicker to allow recreational use of the drug. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel, File)



In this Dec. 22, 2017 photo, Dale Gieringer of NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) poses for photos at his house in Berkeley, Calif.. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a familiar scent in greater-than-normal concentrations. A whiff of marijuana will likely be in the air as the nation's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the first legal retail sales of pot in the state. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)



In this Dec. 21, 2017, file photo, a customer browses a selection of marijuana products displayed at MedMen a marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles . Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a familiar scent in greater-than-normal concentrations. A whiff of marijuana will likely be in the air as the nation's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the first legal retail sales of pot in the state. The historic day comes more than two decades after California paved the way for legal weed by passing the first medical marijuana law in the U.S., though other states were quicker to allow recreational use of the drug. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel, File)



In this Thursday, Dec. 21, 2017 photo sample containers of marijuana are on display at MedMen a medical marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles. California's legal pot market opens for business on Jan. 1. The day will be a milestone, but what exactly will happen then and, especially, in the weeks and months to come is unclear. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)



In this Dec. 22, 2017 photo, Dale Gieringer of NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) poses for photos at his house in Berkeley, Calif. Californians may awake on New Year's Day to a familiar scent in greater-than-normal concentrations. A whiff of marijuana will likely be in the air as the nation's cannabis king lights up to celebrate the first legal retail sales of pot in the state. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: New year brings broad pot legalization to California (2018, January 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-01-year-broad-pot-legalization-california.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.