No. The change made on 1 November 2018 created a limited route for certain cannabis-based medicines to be prescribed by specialist doctors. It did not legalise recreational cannabis, allow anyone to buy or grow it, or make every cannabis product a medicine.

It helps to be precise about what “legal” means. Are you asking whether you can possess cannabis, get a prescription, import a product, or supply it to someone else? Each has different rules. The key point is that **medical cannabis not full legalisation**: UK law still draws a narrow line around lawful medical use.

What changed in 2018?

Before the change, cannabis-based products for medicinal use were generally controlled as Schedule 1 drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. Schedule 1 controls are intended for substances with no recognised medicinal use in that framework, and access is tightly restricted.



From 1 November 2018, qualifying cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans could be placed in Schedule 2. That made prescribing possible in defined circumstances. The change followed reviews by the Chief Medical Officer and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, after high-profile cases brought attention to patients who were unable to access treatment.

Rescheduling changed the rules around medical prescribing and handling. It did *not* remove cannabis from the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, under which cannabis remains a controlled drug. Nor did it create a general right to possess cannabis because someone believes it might help their health.



In practical terms, rescheduling allowed:

- Eligible specialist doctors to prescribe qualifying cannabis-based medicines in limited circumstances.
- Lawful supply and possession when the product is prescribed and obtained through the proper medical and pharmacy channels.
- Medical use to be considered within existing prescribing, medicines-safety and controlled-drug rules.

It did not give the public permission to buy cannabis from a dealer, grow plants at home, share a prescription, or bring cannabis products into the UK without checking the relevant controls.

What remains illegal?

The phrase **recreational cannabis still illegal uk** remains accurate. Recreational possession, production and supply are not made lawful by the 2018 medical change. A medical cannabis prescription is not a general exemption from drug laws; it applies to the prescribed treatment and its lawful supply.

Situation What the 2018 change means Recreational use or possession Not legalised. Cannabis remains a controlled drug. Possessing a prescribed medicine May be lawful when it is a valid prescription and the medicine was obtained through a lawful supply route. Follow the prescription and keep the dispensing label and documentation. Buying cannabis without a prescription A clinic website, online seller or claim of “medical grade” does not itself make a product lawful for you to possess. Importing cannabis or cannabis products A UK prescription should not be treated as automatic permission to import. Controlled-drug import rules and destination-country laws may apply. Passing medicine to another person A prescription is personal. Sharing or supplying a controlled medicine can create serious legal and safety risks.

Importing and travelling

Do not assume that a product bought abroad, or a product that is legal in another country, can be brought into the UK. Importing controlled drugs is subject to separate rules, and travellers may need specific documentation or permission depending on the medicine, route and destination. Check current guidance with the relevant government authority before travelling; also check the law in every country you will enter or transit through.

These rules can be fact-specific. If you need advice about a particular import, possession or supply issue, speak to a solicitor who works in this area. Irwin Mitchell solicitors, for example, provide legal services; contacting a law firm is different from getting clinical advice or confirmation that a particular product is lawful.

Who can prescribe medical cannabis?

In the UK, cannabis-based products for medicinal use are generally initiated by a doctor on the **GMC Specialist Register**, working in the relevant area of medicine. The doctor must consider whether treatment is clinically appropriate, review the patient's history and weigh potential benefits against risks. A product's availability does not mean it is suitable for every patient or condition.

That specialist-only route matters. A GP cannot simply start a cannabis-based medicine because a patient requests one. A GP may be involved in ongoing care or shared-care arrangements where appropriate, but this is not the same as independently initiating treatment. Whether shared care is possible depends on the medicine, the specialist's plan and the GP's clinical responsibilities.

What about "self-prescribing"?

If by self-prescribing you mean choosing a cannabis product and using it without a lawful prescription, that is not a legal route to medical treatment. A diagnosis, previous use, or a recommendation from an online forum does not replace a prescription. Doctors also have professional duties around prescribing controlled drugs and conflicts of interest; patients should not treat a clinician's willingness to assess them as a guarantee of a prescription.

Be wary of websites that imply approval is automatic. A legitimate assessment should include discussion of your condition, previous treatments, other medicines, possible side effects and follow-up. If a clinic appears to promise a prescription before reviewing your case, pause and ask questions.

NHS versus private access

Legal eligibility and practical access are not the same thing. NHS prescriptions exist, but access is limited. NHS England has described NHS prescribing as uncommon, while NICE guidance recommends cannabis-based medicines only for specific circumstances and patient groups. Examples in NICE guidance include certain treatment-resistant epilepsies, nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy in particular circumstances, and spasticity from multiple sclerosis where other treatments have not worked. Recommendations differ by product and condition, so check the current guidance rather than assuming all cannabis products are interchangeable.

For many people who explore treatment, the route is a private clinic. Private care may offer a specialist assessment, but it involves fees and does not guarantee a prescription. Patients should ask what the consultation costs, how follow-up appointments are charged, whether medicine costs are separate, and what happens if treatment is unsuitable or ineffective.

A short checklist before contacting a clinic

- Is the prescribing doctor on the GMC Specialist Register, and is their specialty relevant to your condition?
- What evidence, medical records and previous treatment history will the clinic review?

- What are the consultation, follow-up and medicine costs? Ask for a written breakdown.
- How will the clinic coordinate with your GP, if shared care is being considered?
- What monitoring, side-effect advice and review schedule are included?
- What is the plan if the treatment does not help or causes problems?

Companies such as Releaf operate in the private medical cannabis market. That is a starting point for comparison, not a recommendation or a theukrules.co.uk substitute for checking the prescriber, clinical process, costs and supply arrangements yourself. Private clinics differ, and marketing claims should be checked against the actual service offered.

How to research a clinic without mistaking popularity for proof

Patient reviews can help you understand how people describe communication, appointment booking and customer service. Trustpilot is one place people may look for reviews. Read a range of recent comments, check whether the reviewer appears to have used the service, and look at how the company responds to criticism. Reviews are individual experiences; they cannot establish that a treatment is clinically suitable or that a particular clinic is the best option for you.

SimilarWeb can provide estimates of website traffic and referral patterns. Those figures can help you understand a company's online reach, but they are estimates—not a measure of medical quality, prescribing standards, patient outcomes or regulatory compliance. Use tools such as Trustpilot and SimilarWeb as research aids, not as substitutes for checking the GMC register, the clinic's published information and the terms of care.

Other boundaries patients should understand

A prescription does not automatically settle every question about driving, work, travel or sharing information with other healthcare professionals. Some cannabis-based medicines can cause drowsiness, dizziness or impaired concentration. Follow the prescriber's advice and the product information, and do not drive if you are impaired. The legal rules around driving and prescribed medicines are specific; if you are uncertain, seek advice from your prescriber or an appropriate legal source.

Products also differ. A prescribed cannabis-based medicine is not the same thing as any shop-bought CBD oil, cannabis flower or edible. CBD products may be subject to their own medicines, food and controlled-drug rules, and a product's label does not prove it is free of controlled substances. Do not assume that "CBD" means unrestricted or that a prescription for one product authorises possession of another.

The bottom line on UK cannabis legal boundaries

The 2018 rescheduling was a significant change for patients: it opened a regulated, specialist-led route to certain cannabis-based medicines. But it was a narrow change to prescribing and medical supply, not a general change in the law on cannabis.

- **Recreational cannabis remains illegal in the UK.**
- **Medical access is limited:** treatment must be prescribed through the appropriate specialist route.
- **A prescription is not a licence for everything:** importing, sharing or using a different product raises separate legal and safety questions.

- **NHS access is uncommon;** private care is available but can involve substantial ongoing costs and no guarantee of treatment.

So, does rescheduling mean cannabis is legal for everyone? No. It means certain medicines can be prescribed to certain patients under controlled conditions. When checking any claim, ask what “legal” refers to—possession, prescribing, supply or import—and verify the answer with a named regulator, current official guidance or a suitably qualified professional.