No. The change made on November 1, 2018, created a narrow route for certain cannabis-based medicines to be prescribed. It did not legalize recreational cannabis, make cannabis products freely available, or give people permission to grow, buy, import, or share cannabis.

It helps to be precise about what "legal" means. Are we talking about possessing a medicine that was properly prescribed, a doctor writing that prescription, or a company supplying the product through an authorized route? Those are different questions—and the rules are not interchangeable.

Let me tell you about a situation I encountered made a mistake that cost them thousands.. This guide explains the UK cannabis legal boundaries, what the 2018 change did, and why medical cannabis is not full legalisation. It also covers why recreational cannabis is still illegal in the UK, and what NHS and private access generally look like.



What changed in 2018?

Before November 2018, cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans were generally controlled as Schedule 1 drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. Schedule 1 controls imposed strict limits on possession and use, including for medical treatment.

Following a government review, certain cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans—often shortened to **CBPMs**—were moved to Schedule 2. This change allowed qualifying https://www.theukrules.co.uk/medical-cannabis-in-the-uk-what-the-law-permits-and-how-patients-access-it/ products to be prescribed and supplied under controlled conditions. It did *not* remove cannabis from the UK's controlled-drug framework.

The distinction matters: rescheduling changed how certain products could be handled for medical purposes. It did not turn cannabis into an ordinary over-the-counter medicine or make non-medical possession lawful.

What "rescheduling" does—and does not—mean

Situation What the rules generally mean A qualifying cannabis-based medicine is prescribed by an authorized specialist and supplied lawfully It may be lawful to possess and use it in line with the prescription and applicable rules. Buying cannabis for recreational use Recreational cannabis remains illegal in the UK. Growing cannabis at home or sharing it with someone Rescheduling did not authorize cultivation, sharing, or supply for personal use. Ordering cannabis products from an overseas website Importing controlled drugs can require specific permissions. A website listing a product does not make importing it lawful. Choosing and starting cannabis treatment without a prescriber Self-prescribing is not a lawful substitute for an appropriate prescription and supply route.

This is a general overview, not individual legal advice. The legality of a particular product or situation can depend on its ingredients, classification, prescription, supply chain, and how it is used.

What remains illegal?

Recreational use and possession without a lawful basis

Cannabis remains a controlled drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. In general, possessing cannabis without lawful authority is an offense; supplying or producing it can carry more serious consequences. A medical-cannabis policy change does not provide a defense for recreational use or possession.

A person cannot make recreational cannabis lawful simply by calling it “medical,” buying it from a seller, or believing it could help a health condition. The legal route involves an appropriate clinical decision and a lawful supply chain.

Importing products yourself

Importing a cannabis product is not automatically legal because it is described as CBD, is sold online, or can be purchased in another country. Cannabis-related products can fall under different rules depending on their contents and classification. Controlled drugs may require licenses or other permissions to import.

Travel with a prescribed medicine is a separate issue from ordering a product across a border. Requirements can depend on the destination, the medicine, and the travel arrangements. Check current official rules before travelling, and ask the prescriber or relevant authorities about documentation. Do not assume a UK prescription automatically permits import or possession abroad.

Self-prescribing or using someone else’s medicine

Patients cannot write their own controlled-drug prescriptions, and using another person’s prescribed cannabis medicine is not a workaround. Nor does a recommendation from a non-prescribing website, social-media group, or product seller replace a clinical assessment.

Supply matters as well as the prescription. A product must be prescribed and dispensed through the applicable lawful arrangements. Buying a product from an unregulated seller can create health and legal risks, even if the packaging uses medical language.

Who can prescribe medical cannabis?

In the UK, cannabis-based products for medicinal use are generally prescribed by a doctor who is a specialist on the **General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register**. The prescription must be based on

the clinician's assessment and the circumstances of the individual patient. This is not a service that a GP can generally initiate independently as a routine first prescription.



A GP may be involved in a patient's ongoing care or communicate with a specialist, but that is different from being the specialist who makes the prescribing decision. Patients should ask a clinic who will assess them, whether that doctor is on the GMC Specialist Register, and how the clinic will coordinate with their NHS care.

Being assessed does not guarantee a prescription. A specialist may decide that cannabis-based treatment is unsuitable, that evidence is insufficient for the patient's circumstances, or that another option should be considered first. Prescribing remains a clinical decision, not an entitlement created by the 2018 change.

NHS access versus private access

NHS access is possible, but limited

Medical cannabis can be prescribed through the NHS, but access has been limited. NICE guidance covers particular products and situations, and NHS clinicians are expected to follow relevant guidance and local arrangements. In practice, a patient may find that a specialist does not consider a cannabis-based product appropriate, or that the condition and treatment history do not fit the available recommendations.

That can be frustrating, especially for people living with chronic pain or other long-term conditions. But the existence of private clinics does not mean the NHS has approved cannabis for every condition, nor does a private prescription guarantee NHS funding or continuing NHS prescribing.

Private clinics are not a way around the rules

Private specialist clinics may assess patients for conditions where a cannabis-based product is being considered. They still need to operate within prescribing and controlled-drug rules. A clinic should explain its assessment process, clinical criteria, follow-up arrangements, product costs, and what happens if the treatment is not suitable or does not help.

For example, people researching providers may come across Releaf. Treat any clinic's website as the start of your research, not proof that you will qualify or that treatment is right for you. Ask who the prescribing

clinician is, verify the clinician's registration, and request a clear breakdown of likely costs before committing.

Private costs can include an initial consultation, follow-up appointments, and the medicine itself; the amounts and frequency vary by provider and treatment plan. Ask for the total expected cost over a realistic period, not just a headline consultation price. Also clarify whether repeat prescriptions require regular reviews and what support is available if side effects occur.

How to check a clinic without mistaking popularity for quality

Online research can help you form questions, but it cannot confirm that a clinic is clinically appropriate for you. Use review and traffic tools for limited purposes, then check the underlying facts.

- **Trustpilot:** Read a range of recent reviews, including critical ones. Reviews can describe customer experiences, but they do not establish clinical effectiveness, prescribing standards, or whether a product is suitable for you.
- **Similarweb:** This tool can provide estimates of website traffic and audience patterns. Traffic is not a measure of medical quality, legality, or patient outcomes.
- **GMC register:** Check the named doctor's registration and specialist status rather than relying only on a clinic's marketing.
- **Written costs and terms:** Ask for consultation, medicine, follow-up, and cancellation costs in writing. Confirm what happens if you are not prescribed treatment.
- **Clinical safeguards:** Ask how the clinic reviews your medical history, communicates with your other clinicians, monitors treatment, and handles adverse effects.

If you are uncertain about your rights, employment, driving, travel, or a dispute involving a prescription, an appropriate legal adviser can explain how the rules apply to your circumstances. Irwin Mitchell solicitors, for example, provide legal services; contacting a law firm is different from getting a clinical assessment or a prescription.

A practical checklist for patients

1. **Identify the question:** Is it about possession, prescribing, supply, importing, travel, or use? The answer may differ for each.
2. **Check the prescriber:** Confirm who would make the decision and check their GMC Specialist Register status.
3. **Ask about suitability:** Discuss your diagnosis, previous treatments, other medicines, and the evidence the clinician is using.
4. **Confirm the supply route:** Ask how the medicine will be prescribed and dispensed. Do not rely on an unverified seller or overseas website.
5. **Get the full cost:** Request likely ongoing costs and follow-up requirements before deciding on private care.
6. **Follow the prescription:** Use the product only as directed, and ask your prescriber or pharmacist about any uncertainty. Do not share it or change how you take it without advice.

So, does rescheduling mean cannabis is legal for everyone?

No. The 2018 change created a controlled medical route for certain cannabis-based products; it did not legalize cannabis generally. Recreational cannabis is still illegal in the UK, and possession, supply, production, importing, and treatment each have their own legal requirements.

The clearest way to think about the law is to separate three questions: **Was the medicine prescribed by an appropriate specialist? Was it supplied through a lawful route? Are you possessing and using it in line with the prescription and applicable rules?** If any answer is unclear, ask the prescriber, pharmacist, or a qualified legal adviser before acting.