



NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports
Question and Answer Document
Legislative recommendation to remove cannabinoids from list of NCAA Banned Substances

This document contains information, questions and answers to assist the NCAA membership in its understanding of the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports legislative recommendation to remove cannabinoids from the list of NCAA banned substances.

Background and history.

At its September 2023 meeting, the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports made a legislative recommendation to each of the appropriate divisional governance bodies to consider removing cannabinoids from the list of NCAA banned substances. The recommendation was based on extensive study informed by subject matter experts (including medical doctors, substance misuse experts and membership practitioners), consensus opinion from the 2022 Summit on Cannabis in Collegiate Athletics and referrals from Divisions II and III. Importantly, removing cannabinoids from the list of banned substances does not condone or promote cannabinoid use, instead, removing cannabinoids from the list of banned substances:

1. Acknowledges the ineffectiveness of existing policy (banning, testing and penalizing) and acknowledges that educating student athletes on health threats posed by contemporary cannabis, coupled with effective individual campus management strategies are more effective than a punitive approach.
2. Affirms the role of the NCAA drug-testing program to address only performance enhancing substances.
3. Aims to recenter student-athlete health by promoting local testing and education to identify problematic cannabinoid use coupled with local harm reduction, cannabis use disorder and cannabis/co-morbid mental health disorder management strategies.
4. Emphasizes the importance of moving toward a harm reduction strategy, similar to alcohol, that prioritizes education, support and evidence- and consensus-based management over penalty.

CSMAS first recommended the removal of the class of drugs that included cannabinoids in 2014. NCAA Task Force work in 2012 and 2013 noted that existing penalties were ineffective deterrents of problematic cannabinoid use and agreed that other intervention strategies should be pursued. While the 2014 recommendation was not adopted by the membership, CSMAS recognized, then and now, that the environment (cultural, legal, scientific and medical information and membership opinion) around cannabinoids continues to evolve.

In 2022, to better understand the current literature, policy and research about cannabinoids CSMAS commissioned the Summit on Cannabis in Collegiate Athletics. The summit included more than 60 individuals representing industry and subject matter experts and the NCAA membership.

Specifically, the summit aimed to develop potential consensus recommendations that could inform future education, policy, management and research opportunities regarding cannabinoid use in collegiate sport. Attendees of the summit reached a consensus opinion that cannabinoids are not a performance-enhancing drug, that national-level testing for cannabinoids is not an effective intervention strategy and that a harm reduction approach to cannabinoids, like alcohol, is best implemented at the local level.

Importantly, a robust educational program is recommended in parallel to this recommended change to educate both the membership and student-athletes about contemporary cannabinoids and the harm associated with problematic use.

The following questions and answers attempt to address specific questions and concerns identified since CSMAS formalized its recommendation.

Question No. 1: Does removal of the cannabinoids class from the list of NCAA banned substances indicate support for cannabinoid use?

Answer: No. Instead, the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports agrees that this change better supports the health of student-athletes by acknowledging the ineffectiveness of existing policy and promoting more-effective harm-reduction strategies at the local level that are aimed at education, support and prevention and management of problematic cannabinoid use.

Question No. 2: Has national-level testing for cannabinoids proven to be an effective deterrent for NCAA student-athlete cannabinoid use?

Answer: No.

Question No. 3: If the recommendation is adopted, will the NCAA provide additional educational resources and programming that address substance misuse and impact of modern cannabinoids?

Answer: Yes.

Question No. 4: Are substances in the cannabinoids class considered performance-enhancing?

Answer: No. CSMAS agrees with the consensus opinion from the Summit on Cannabis in Collegiate Athletics that cannabinoids are not performance-enhancing substances.

Question No. 5: Does the NCAA drug-testing program prohibit alcohol?

Answer: No.

Question No. 6: If the cannabinoids class is removed from the banned substance list, does local testing remain a valuable harm-reduction strategy?

Answer: Yes. Local testing can be a valuable harm-reduction strategy. However, schools are encouraged to create a harm-reduction strategy that best serves its student-athletes. This may include testing, educational resources, programming, screening, or any combination of these strategies.

Question No. 7: If the cannabinoids class is removed from the banned substance list, will the NCAA provide schools with information on how to operate effective drug-testing programs?

Answer: Yes.

Question No. 8: When does the NCAA test for cannabinoids?

Answer: Currently, NCAA drug-testing includes cannabinoids during championship testing. It is not included as part of the year-round or summer testing program. Other testing occasions, such as exit tests, follow-up tests and breach of protocol, may include testing for all banned-substance classes.

Question No. 9: What is the penalty for testing positive for a substance in the cannabinoids class?

Answer: Currently, there is no penalty if the student-athlete engages with the school in an education and management plan for substance misuse, as developed or facilitated by the school.

Question No. 10: If the recommendation is adopted, would the NCAA continue to test for substances in the cannabinoids class?

Answer: No.

Question No. 11: What substances are included in the cannabinoids class?

Answer: Any substance chemically/pharmacologically related to the cannabinoids class. Examples include marijuana, synthetic cannabinoids (Spice; K2; JWH-018; JWH-073), tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, Delta-8).

Application and Effective Date.

Question No. 12: When will the divisions consider the recommendation?

Answer: Each division will follow its legislative process to consider the recommendation.

Question No. 13: What is the recommended effective date for the recommendation?

Answer: Immediate; if adopted, any penalty associated with a previous positive test would be rendered moot.

Question No. 14: If the recommendation is adopted, would a student-athlete serving a withholding penalty associated with a previous positive NCAA drug-test for cannabinoids be required to serve the remainder of their penalty?

Answer: No.

Question No. 15: If all the divisions do not adopt the recommendation, how would a positive cannabinoid test apply to a student-athlete who transfers from a division where cannabinoids are banned to a division where cannabinoids are not banned?

Answer: The recommendation would defer to divisional preference.