Yes. Medical cannabis can affect your ability to operate machinery, even when it has been prescribed legally. Some products can cause sleepiness, dizziness, slower reactions, changes in attention or difficulty concentrating. Those effects may make work unsafe, particularly if your job involves vehicles, power tools, production lines, lifting equipment or responsibility for other people's safety.

A prescription does not automatically mean you are fit to work, and a diagnosis does not tell you how a medicine will affect you. The practical question is whether you can do your particular job safely while taking your prescribed product. Discuss that with your prescriber and, where appropriate, your employer's occupational health service.

This guide explains the UK rules and workplace considerations. It is general information, not individual medical or legal advice. If you are asking whether treatment is "legal", it helps to separate three questions: **is possession lawful, is the prescription valid, and has the product entered the UK through a lawful supply chain?**

Quick checklist before operating machinery

- **Do not operate machinery** if you feel drowsy, dizzy, confused, unusually slowed down or otherwise impaired.
- Ask your specialist prescriber how the product, dose and timing could affect your work.
- Check your employer's medicines, fitness-for-work and safety policies.
- Do not assume a product is safe at work because it is prescribed or because you have used it before.
- Seek individual advice if you are unsure about driving, workplace testing or your employment rights.

How medical cannabis might affect machinery work

"Medical cannabis" is not one standard medicine. Products can differ in their ingredients, strength, formulation and method of use. THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) can cause intoxication and impair alertness, coordination, judgement and reaction time. CBD (cannabidiol) is not intoxicating in the same way, but CBD products can still have side effects or interact with other medicines. The effects depend on the person and the treatment, so there is no universal waiting time after a dose that guarantees safe machinery operation.



Other medicines matter too. Combining cannabis-based products with alcohol, sleeping tablets, opioid pain medicines or other sedating drugs may increase impairment. Your underlying condition—such as pain, poor sleep or a neurological condition—may also affect safe performance. These are reasons to ask for individual **operate machinery advice**, rather than relying on a general rule or another patient's experience.

What to do when starting or changing treatment

Starting treatment, increasing a dose or changing product can alter how you feel. Ask your prescriber what side effects to watch for and what to do if they occur. If you notice impairment, do not try to "push through" a safety-critical task. Stop work if it is safe to do so, follow your workplace procedure and contact your prescriber for advice.

These are practical **impairment precautions**, not a substitute for a clinical assessment. Your prescriber can advise on your treatment; your employer is responsible for managing workplace safety. In some roles, occupational health may help assess how a health condition or medicine affects your duties.

What did the 2018 change in UK law actually do?

On **1 November 2018**, the UK rescheduled certain cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans (CBPMs). The change meant that qualifying products could be prescribed under controlled-drug rules by doctors on the relevant specialist register. It did **not** make cannabis generally legal, allow recreational use or give every doctor permission to prescribe it.

In practical terms, a lawful prescription is only one part of the picture. The product must meet the relevant legal requirements, be prescribed by an authorised clinician and be obtained through a lawful route. A patient should not treat the 2018 change as permission to buy cannabis from an unregulated seller, bring products into the UK without checking the rules or use someone else's medicine.

What remains illegal or restricted?

- **Recreational possession and use:** cannabis remains a controlled drug. A person's lawful possession of a prescribed product does not make recreational cannabis lawful.

- **Unlawful supply:** supplying or sharing a controlled drug outside the lawful medicines system can be an offence. Do not give your medicine to another person.
- **Self-prescribing:** patients cannot make their own cannabis prescription. A qualified prescriber must assess and prescribe treatment through the proper route.
- **Importing:** importing controlled drugs without the required permissions may be unlawful. Rules can differ for travel with prescribed medicine, so check official guidance and obtain any required documentation before travelling.

“Legal” is therefore not a single yes-or-no label: lawful possession of your own prescribed medicine is different from recreational possession, unauthorised supply or an unlawful import. If your circumstances involve travel, a workplace drug test, a dispute or police contact, get advice specific to those facts.

Who can prescribe, and how does access work?

UK guidance restricts prescribing of cannabis-based products for medicinal use to doctors on the appropriate **General Medical Council (GMC) Specialist Register**. In England, Scotland and Wales, a specialist doctor typically makes the decision in their area of expertise, after considering the patient’s condition, previous treatments, evidence and risks. A GP cannot usually start a cannabis-based prescription independently. A GP may be involved in your wider care, but that is not the same as initiating specialist treatment.

NHS access

NHS access is limited. NICE guidance recommends particular cannabis-based medicines for certain defined situations, including some forms of severe epilepsy, chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting, and multiple-sclerosis spasticity in specified circumstances. Eligibility depends on the individual and the relevant guidance; many people who enquire about medical cannabis will not meet NHS criteria. A specialist can explain available options and whether a referral or further treatment is appropriate.

Private access

Private clinics may assess people who cannot access treatment through the NHS, but a private consultation does not guarantee a prescription. The clinician must decide that treatment is appropriate and lawful. Ask who will prescribe, whether the doctor is on the relevant GMC Specialist Register, what follow-up is provided and what the full costs may be—including consultations, medicine, repeat reviews and delivery.

For example, Releaf is one company people may encounter when researching private medical-cannabis services. That mention is not an endorsement or a guarantee of suitability. Before choosing any clinic, check its clinicians and service arrangements directly, and compare more than marketing claims. **Trustpilot** can show customer feedback, while **SimilarWeb** https://www.theukrules.co.uk/medical-cannabis-in-the-uk-what-the-law-permits-and-how-patients-access-it/ can help you understand a website’s estimated traffic and audience. Neither tool verifies clinical quality, prescribing standards or whether a treatment is right for you.

Question What to check Who makes the prescribing decision? Confirm the prescriber’s identity, speciality and GMC registration status. What will treatment cost? Ask for a clear breakdown of consultation, medicine and follow-up charges. What happens if work becomes difficult? Ask about side-effect support, review arrangements and documentation for occupational health. Are reviews of the clinic reliable? Use review and website-analysis tools as background information, not proof of clinical standards.

Workplace rules, disclosure and drug testing

Employers have duties to manage health and safety, especially where impairment could put you or others at risk. They may have policies covering prescribed medicines, fitness for work, drug testing and safety-critical duties. A prescription is relevant context, but it does not require an employer to ignore a safety concern or allow someone to operate machinery while impaired.

There is no single answer to whether you must tell your employer. It can depend on your role, contract, workplace policy and the risks involved. You may be able to discuss functional effects with occupational health without sharing every detail of your medical history with a line manager. Ask who will see any information, how it will be used and what adjustments may be considered.

If a drug test is used, ask what the process is for declaring prescribed medication and providing evidence. Testing policies vary, and a test result does not by itself establish whether you were impaired at work. Do not assume that a prescription automatically resolves a workplace dispute; keep your prescription information and follow the employer's reporting procedure.

Depending on the facts, health and disability protections may be relevant, but they do not remove the need to manage a genuine safety risk. If you face disciplinary action, dismissal or a dispute about adjustments, an employment solicitor can explain your options. Irwin Mitchell solicitors is one example of a firm offering legal services; check that any adviser you approach has experience relevant to your issue. This is not a recommendation.

Driving and operating machinery are related, but not the same

Workplace machinery is not governed by a simple rule that mirrors driving law. In Great Britain, drug-driving law includes specified limits for controlled drugs, including THC. A statutory medical defence may apply in some circumstances when a medicine has been prescribed and taken in accordance with instructions, but **it is not permission to drive while impaired**. Northern Ireland has its own legal arrangements, so check the rules where you live.

Do not use a driving rule as a safe-work rule. The machinery, task, workplace controls and consequences of an error may be different. If your job includes driving on public roads as well as operating equipment, discuss both activities with your prescriber and seek advice about the applicable rules.



Questions to take to your prescriber or employer

1. Could this product affect alertness, coordination or reaction time, and what signs of impairment should I look for?
2. Could the dose timing, a dose change or other medicines affect my shift?
3. What should I do if side effects begin while I am at work?
4. Can occupational health receive a functional summary of any work restrictions?
5. What does my employer require me to disclose before doing safety-critical tasks?

The practical takeaway

Medical cannabis can affect work if you operate machinery. The 2018 rescheduling opened a narrow route to lawful specialist prescribing; it did not legalise recreational use or remove workplace safety responsibilities. Confirm that treatment is prescribed through the proper route, understand how it affects you and follow your clinic's and employer's procedures.

If you feel impaired, do not operate machinery. Pause the task safely, report the concern as required and seek clinical advice. That is a safer starting point than assuming that a prescription makes every work activity safe.