

# Are federal marijuana laws keeping us sick? - AvvoStories

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## Are federal marijuana laws keeping us sick?

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◀ 673

◀ 3



[Initial studies](#) at the Salk Institute indicate that marijuana extracts might stop the neuron death that causes Alzheimer's—but the Salk researchers can't progress to the next stage of testing. Why? Because marijuana is still listed as a Schedule I drug by the federal government.

Located in California, where marijuana is legal, the Salk Institute performed its initial studies using a tiny quantity of cannabinoid extracted from chromatography standards used in drug testing—a legal but extremely limited source. The Salk results indicate that THC, the main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, promotes the removal of amyloid beta, a protein that forms a toxic plaque in the brains of Alzheimer's patients.

But since the Salk Institute receives funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), it must comply with the [Controlled Substances Act](#) (CSA) of 1970 or risk losing its NIH funding. And because Schedule I drugs, which include heroin and LSD along with marijuana, are defined as those with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse, that's a problem.

## No green light for research

While many states have recognized medical uses for marijuana, as recently as last year the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) confirmed marijuana's place in Schedule I. The DEA's reasoning seemed somewhat circular, referencing absence of scientific data proving cannabis to be a "safe and effective drug," an absence that could be due to the legal difficulty of studying medical uses for marijuana.

The DEA softened the blow by announcing that it would allow more universities to apply to grow marijuana for research purposes. Since 1968, only one research institute in the nation—the University of Mississippi—has been authorized to produce research marijuana, and some researchers are dissatisfied with its product.

But supply is only part of the problem. To conduct further studies, the Salk Institute must apply for a Schedule I license, which requires a safety and security evaluation that few hospitals and research institutions can pass. Processing the application often takes three to six months. The Salk Institute submitted an application in December.

Every day, California residents fill prescriptions for medical marijuana to treat a variety of medical conditions for which there is only anecdotal evidence of any benefit. Meanwhile, researchers at the Salk Institute, who are sitting on data that could prevent a disease which affects 5.5 million Americans and costs \$259 billion per year, are left awaiting a federal license to buy a substance that's available over the counter in their state.

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