Magic mushrooms for sale in Canada: Five employer questions answered

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The retail sale of psilocybin, better known as “magic mushrooms”, has recently received extensive media coverage. Employers across Canada are increasingly wondering how to address the use or simple possession of psilocybin in the workplace. This article answers five recurring questions.

Current situation

Long used by aficionados for their supposed mind-sharpening and other properties, magic mushrooms seem to have sprung out of Canada’s back alleys in recent years.

In Ontario, at least one storefront retailer has set up shop in Ottawa. In Québec, a similar Montréal business received extensive media coverage when it became the target of repeated police searches within hours of opening in summer 2023. Online, the sale of psilocybin for recreational use or microdosing – low-dose self-medication – is reportedly surging.

While it is illegal to sell, buy or possess psilocybin in Canada, the substance appears to be gaining in popularity. It has even been spotted on billboards in some Canadian cities. As we’ve seen with cannabis, which was normalized before becoming legal, some employees may now wrongly believe that they can legally use or possess magic mushrooms – even in the workplace.

Employer questions about a mushrooming phenomenon

For Canadian employers, it can be difficult to get a good handle on the impact of rising magic mushroom use, let alone detect it. To help, we have compiled five questions to get you on the right track.

1. What are the effects of psilocybin use?

Magic mushrooms have a chemical composition similar to serotonin, one of our feel-good hormones. They also have hallucinogenic properties.

Health Canada lists a number of effects related to psilocybin use. In the short term, it can cause euphoria and uncontrollable laughter. But it can also cause hallucinations, fear and paranoia. Someone who has taken magic mushrooms may appear confused or disoriented or experience panic attacks.[1]

The effects generally appear within 15 to 45 minutes of ingestion and last for four to six hours.

Magic mushrooms are usually ingested in solid form (as a tablet or dried and ground up) or infused to make a tea. When in powder form, they can also be snorted. They should never be injected. Doing so can result in a serious medical emergency, since it can cause septic shock and multi-system organ failure.

2. What signs of psilocybin use can be detected in the workplace?

Along with the mood-altering and cognitive effects described above, the physical effects can include lightheadedness, spasms or convulsions, sweating, numbness, pupil dilation, loss of coordination and even loss of urinary control. However, these signs are not necessarily specific to psilocybin use.

These effects mean that magic mushroom use is not readily compatible with many jobs, particularly high-risk trades that involve operating precision tools, working at heights or driving motorized vehicles.

No two doses are the same. There are different species of magic mushroom, and effects can even vary between two mushrooms of the same species. Consequently, users cannot easily anticipate the effects based on the dose ingested. Given its long-lasting effects, psilocybin could interfere with an employee's performance even when taken outside work hours.

In addition, severe intoxication can result from accidentally consuming magic mushroom look-alikes.

No studies have evaluated the long-term effects of extended magic mushroom use. Currently, there is little evidence that consuming hallucinogenic mushrooms can cause physical dependence, but continued use could result in psychological dependence. Many users appear to develop a tolerance to the drug and ramp up consumption to achieve the desired effect.

In contrast, microdosing involves taking small quantities (about 100 mg, or one tenth of a normal dose) every few days. According to microdosing proponents, this is not enough to produce the common psychoactive effects, but it does help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.

3. How can employers recognize psilocybin products?

These products are typically sold as dried mushrooms. However, since they are consumed in different ways, possession may be hard to detect in the workplace. For example, they can be infused in honey, oil or tea or used as an ingredient in risotto.

4. Does psilocybin have therapeutic effects?

While psilocybin has long been consumed recreationally, its therapeutic use is currently being studied to properly evaluate its potential as a partial treatment for addiction, depression and post-traumatic stress. Clinical trials of such psychedelic-assisted psychotherapies have only been authorized in Canada for a few years and are carried out under strict supervision.

It is therefore not impossible for an employee to be consuming psilocybin as part of a research study into its medical uses.

5. How should employers react to psilocybin's growing popularity?

To proactively manage the rise of magic mushrooms on the Canadian market, we strongly recommend that employers review their policies on drugs, alcohol and other substances to ensure that workplace possession, use and sale are clearly prohibited. This should apply so long as the substance remains illegal.

Currently, the cultivation, production, possession, purchase and sale of magic mushrooms are illegal. Employers must therefore ensure that employees do not bring such products into the workplace, even if they have no intention of consuming them there.

Employer policies should require any employee or self-employed worker with a medical prescription for psilocybin or cannabis to advise their human resources department as soon as possible. The employer should in turn seek the advice of a health professional to determine whether this substance use is compatible with the employee's duties. As necessary, the employer could then work with the prescribing professional to prevent the dosage regimen from interfering with work. The employer should also make sure that it poses no risk to the health and safety of the employee or the people around them.

Contact us

If you have any questions regarding this article or how to manage psychoactive substances in the workplace, please do not hesitate to reach out to the author or any member of our Labour and Employment Group.

The author thanks Leila Zaouali, student at law, for her contribution in writing this article.

[1] Psilocybin and psilocin (Magic mushrooms) – Canada.ca

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