



HEALING IN MOTION

People are always part of the picture

EMERGENCY SERVICES OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

Lawful Medical Cannabis in Real-World Operational Settings

Operational Reference Document — Demo Version (v1.0) | 2026

Structured operational clarity for emergency service professionals encountering lawful medical cannabis in real-world settings.

Lawful. Proportionate. Defensible.

1 POSITIONING

Medical cannabis has been lawful in the United Kingdom since November 2018 under specialist prescription. Emergency service professionals are increasingly encountering individuals who may be in lawful possession of cannabis-based medicinal products (CBPMs) within operational environments.

These encounters often occur:

- under time pressure
- with incomplete information
- within publicly accountable situations

Where legal status is not clearly understood at the point of decision, this creates operational risk.

This guidance provides structured, operational clarity to support lawful, proportionate, and defensible decision-making in real-world contexts.

2 LEGAL POSITION — UNITED KINGDOM

Controlled substance

Cannabis remains a Class B controlled drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Unlawful possession remains an offence.

Lawful prescription

Amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 permit specialist doctors to prescribe cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs).

Where a valid prescription exists, a patient may lawfully possess and use their prescribed medication in accordance with clinical guidance.

A lawful prescription does not remove: public safety responsibilities, impairment-related enforcement thresholds, or wider legal obligations.

3 OPERATIONAL REALITY

Emergency service professionals are required to make decisions rapidly, with limited verification, and under scrutiny.

Uncertainty arises where:

- prescription status is unclear
- indicators are unfamiliar
- assumptions are made without verification

Incorrect handling can result in:

- unnecessary escalation
- inappropriate enforcement
- avoidable complaint or challenge

— reputational and procedural risk

Clear operational understanding supports consistent and defensible responses.

4 CORE OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

A lawful prescription constitutes lawful possession
 Presence of cannabis does not automatically indicate criminal activity

Odour alone does not determine illegality

Context, behaviour, and available indicators must be considered collectively

Medical use does not automatically indicate impairment

Impairment, where present, remains subject to standard enforcement frameworks

Decisions should be based on observable evidence and context. Not assumption.

5 ENCOUNTERING & VERIFYING PRESCRIPTION STATUS

Operational encounters may include:

- roadside interactions
- public engagement
- welfare checks
- custody or hospital environments

Where prescription status is asserted — assessment should precede assumption.

There is no requirement for individuals to carry documentation at all times.

However, supporting indicators may include:

Supporting indicators
 — pharmacy-labelled packaging
 — prescription documentation
 — clinic correspondence
 — digital confirmation

Where provided, consider:
 — patient identification consistency
 — prescribing source
 — dispensing details
 — quantities aligned with personal treatment

Verification may be undertaken through appropriate channels where necessary.

6 IMPAIRMENT & PUBLIC SAFETY

A lawful prescription does not exempt individuals from public safety obligations.

It is essential to distinguish between:

<p>Lawful possession Holding a valid prescription</p>	<p>Lawful use Medicating in accordance with clinical guidance</p>	<p>Observable impairment Evidence-based assessment — standard thresholds apply</p>
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In driving contexts, this includes application of impairment assessment procedures and Road Traffic Act 1988 provisions.

7 OPERATIONAL CONTEXTS

<p>Roadside & Public Encounters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Assess behavioural indicators — Evaluate impairment risk — Consider prescription context where asserted 	<p>Custody & Detention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Safeguard medication as property — Record presence of prescribed medication — Verify where required
<p>Medical / Ambulance Contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Treat as prescribed medication — Safeguard and maintain continuity — Record if clinically relevant 	<p>Domestic & Welfare Environments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Lawful possession within private settings — Separate legal status from nuisance or safeguarding — Focus on purpose of attendance

8 PROPERTY, POLICY & COMMUNITY CONTEXT

A lawful prescription does not override: private property rights, venue policies, or licensing conditions.

Operational distinction may be required between:

- lawful possession
- compliance with environment or policy
- public order considerations

Community complaints (e.g. odour or disturbance) must be assessed independently of prescription status.

9 DOCUMENTATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

Professional handling includes clear and proportionate recording.

Where relevant, this may include:

- Whether prescription status was asserted
- Documentation observed, if any
- Behavioural or impairment indicators noted
- Actions taken and rationale

Recording should remain factual, neutral, and proportionate.

10 QUICK RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

To support consistent handling across all operational settings:

- 1 ACKNOWLEDGE** Maintain a calm, neutral approach. Do not assume criminal activity based on presence or odour alone.
- 2 CLARIFY** Establish key facts and context. Has prescription status been asserted? What documentation is available?
- 3 ASSESS CONTEXT** Consider the environment, behaviour, and public safety factors. Is there evidence of impairment?
- 4 RESPOND** Act based on evidence and the applicable legal framework. Proportionate, defensible, consistent.
- 5 RECORD** Document relevant information where appropriate. Recording should be factual, neutral, and proportionate.

11 SCENARIO SNAPSHOTS — DEMO EXAMPLES

Roadside Encounter — Cannabis odour present. Driver states prescription.

- Do not assume illegality based on odour alone
- Assess for observable impairment using standard procedures
- Consider prescription context and available indicators
- Act proportionately based on evidence

Domestic Welfare Check — Cannabis present in private residence.

- Consider lawful possession within private settings
- Focus on the primary purpose of attendance
- Avoid unrelated escalation
- Record presence if relevant to the welfare situation

Medical Attendance — Prescribed cannabis present during patient care.

- Treat as prescribed medication — not controlled substance enforcement
- Safeguard appropriately alongside other medications
- Maintain continuity of treatment where possible
- Record if clinically or operationally relevant

12 CLOSING POSITION

Cannabis remains a controlled substance under UK law.

However, lawful prescription of cannabis-based medicinal products is an established medical pathway.

Operational clarity requires the ability to:

- distinguish lawful possession from criminal activity
- assess context and behaviour appropriately
- respond proportionately based on evidence

Lawful enforcement

Responses grounded in current law and evidence

Professional integrity

Consistent, defensible decision-making under scrutiny

Public confidence

Proportionate handling that reflects operational capability

Healing in Motion

A specialist training and advisory organisation focused on lawful medical cannabis integration across housing, employment, and authority settings.

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