IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT CANNABIS RETAILERS

Last Reviewed: August 20, 2026

Licensed cannabis retailers are regulated businesses that must comply with California law, Department of Cannabis Control (DCC) regulations, and applicable local requirements. In San Francisco, cannabis businesses also need authorization from the City. If you have a concern about a licensed retailer, you may contact the business directly or the appropriate state or local regulator.

WHAT IS CANNABIS?

Cannabis is a plant regulated in California for both adult-use and medicinal use. California allows adults age 21 and older to possess and use cannabis within legal limits. People age 18 and older may use medicinal cannabis with a valid physician's recommendation or qualifying medical marijuana identification card (MMIC). Cannabis can cause impairment and may carry health risks; consumers should follow California public-health guidance and use cannabis responsibly.

WHAT IS A CANNABIS RETAILER?

A cannabis retailer is a business licensed by the California Department of Cannabis Control to sell cannabis goods. Retailers may operate a storefront that customers visit in person, conduct sales by delivery, or both, as authorized by their licenses and local permits. Licensed retailers may sell only cannabis goods that have passed required testing and quality-assurance review, along with permitted accessories and branded merchandise.

WHO MAY PURCHASE CANNABIS?

Adult-use customers must be at least 21 years old. Medicinal cannabis patients may be 18 or older with a valid physician's recommendation. Before a sale, retailers must verify the customer's age and identity using acceptable, valid identification, such as a government-issued photo ID, military photo ID, or passport. California also imposes daily purchase limits for adult-use and medicinal customers.

ARE CANNABIS RETAILERS LEGAL UNDER CALIFORNIA LAW?

Yes, when properly licensed and operated. California voters approved Proposition 215 in 1996 for medicinal cannabis and Proposition 64 in 2016 for adult-use cannabis. Today, commercial cannabis activity is regulated under Division 10 of the California Business and Professions Code and DCC regulations. A cannabis business must maintain the required state license and comply with local authorization requirements for the premises where it operates.

HOW ARE CANNABIS RETAILERS REGULATED IN SAN FRANCISCO?

The San Francisco Office of Cannabis issues local cannabis business permits and coordinates with other City departments and state agencies. Local rules include land-use, permitting, public-safety, and neighborhood requirements. Among other requirements, a proposed storefront retailer generally must:

- Meet applicable location restrictions. San Francisco generally prohibits a cannabis retail use within 600 feet of a K-12 school or another parcel with a valid City cannabis retailer permit, subject to the specific rules and exceptions in the Planning Code.
- Obtain required City approvals and a Cannabis Business Permit, in addition to the applicable state license.
- Maintain an approved security plan and comply with state video-surveillance requirements. Storefront retailers must also have qualified onsite security personnel during hours of operation.
- Complete required community outreach and maintain a Good Neighbor Policy addressing neighborhood impacts and concerns.
- Comply with applicable building, fire, accessibility, odor, sanitation, operating, and other permit conditions.

To report suspected illegal cannabis activity in San Francisco, use the Office of Cannabis reporting service on SF.gov/departments--office-cannabis. The Office of Cannabis can also be reached at (628) 652-0420 or officeofcannabis@sfgov.org.

WHAT ABOUT CANNABIS AND YOUTH?

Licensed retailers are required to prevent sales to underage customers and verify age before a sale. California also restricts cannabis advertising and marketing directed to people under 21 or designed to be attractive to children. Cannabis products must be kept away from children and youth, and adults should follow state guidance for safe storage and responsible use.

WHAT SECURITY REQUIREMENTS APPLY TO STOREFRONT RETAILERS?

California requires video surveillance at licensed retail premises, including coverage of entrances, exits, limited-access areas, and areas where cannabis goods are handled or stored. Storefront retailers must hire or contract for qualified security personnel who are at least 21 years old and properly licensed by the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services. Local permits and approved security plans may impose additional requirements.

CAN CUSTOMERS RESELL CANNABIS THEY PURCHASE?

A retail purchase does not authorize a customer to engage in commercial cannabis sales. Commercial cannabis activity requires the appropriate state license and local authorization. Licensed retailers must follow daily sales limits and other controls intended to keep cannabis within the regulated market.

WHY HAVE STOREFRONTS AS WELL AS DELIVERY?

California recognizes both storefront and delivery retail models. Delivery can provide convenient access for customers who prefer or need home delivery, while storefronts provide in-person access to licensed staff and allow customers to compare legally packaged products and ask questions before purchasing. Both models are subject to state licensing and applicable local rules.

ADDITIONAL CURRENT RETAILER REQUIREMENT

Since March 1, 2025, California licensed retailers, including storefront and delivery retailers, must prominently display the DCC/CDPH responsible-cannabis-use brochure at the point of sale or final delivery and online at the time of online purchase, and must offer a copy to each new consumer. The state brochure may not be altered.

SOURCES/CURRENT AUTHORITIES

1. California Department of Cannabis Control, Retail: cannabis.ca.gov/licensees/retail/
2. California Department of Cannabis Control, Responsible Cannabis Use and SB 540 Retailer Requirements: cannabis.ca.gov/consumers/responsible-cannabis-use/ and cannabis.ca.gov/consumers/responsible-cannabis-use/sb-540-retailer-requirements/; including § 26070.3.
3. California Department of Cannabis Control, Medicinal and Adult Use Cannabis Regulations (revised Jan. 1, 2026), including 4 CCR §§ 15044, 15045, 15404 and 15409.
4. California Business & Professions Code, Division 10, including §§ 26054, 26070, 26152 and 26154.
5. San Francisco Office of Cannabis: SF.gov/departments--office-cannabis; San Francisco Planning Code § 202.2; San Francisco Police Code Article 16.

This handout provides general educational information and is not legal advice. Cannabis laws, regulations, and permit conditions can change. Businesses should confirm current requirements with the DCC, the San Francisco Office of Cannabis, and legal or compliance counsel as appropriate.