New York Set to Legalize Medical Marijuana But With Strict Limits

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In about 18 months, New York will become the nation's 23rd state to allow doctors to prescribe medical marijuana. The announcement of the Empire State's upcoming legalization of pot for patients was preceded by a new deal forged between Governor Andrew Cuomo and the State Senate, the New York Daily News reported.

Legislators said the law is, so far, one of the toughest state regulations on medicinal pot in the country. Under the legislation, patients will have to register on a state database before they are prescribed marijuana by a licensed doctor and, in an interesting caveat, will not be allowed to smoke the drug. Instead, patients will have to ingest their medical marijuana through vaporization, oils or pills.

In addition, New York State law will limit the use of medical marijuana to just 10 serious illnesses and conditions, which include cancer, HIV/AIDS, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and Lou Gehrig's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases as well as certain spinal cord injuries.

The government will also have the right to suspend the pro-pot program at any time on the advice of the health commissioner or state police superintendent, as part of a safeguard provision included in the bill.

"Medical marijuana has the capacity to do a lot of good for a lot of people who are in pain and suffering," Cuomo said. But, added the governor, "there are risks to public health and safety that have to be averted. I believe this bill is the right balance."

Before the new law gets implemented, the Department of Health must develop regulations on the drug, train and certify doctors to prescribe pot, and license organizations to grow and distribute medical marijuana throughout the state.

Interested in the legal process behind New York State's decision? Click here to read an overview of how pro-pot advocates are helping to guide medical marijuana into the mainstream.

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