

Feds Won't Target Medical Marijuana:

When patients comply with state law

(AP) -- Pot-smoking patients or their sanctioned suppliers should not be targeted for federal prosecution in states that allow medical marijuana, including Oregon and Washington, prosecutors were told Monday in a new policy memo issued by the Justice Department.

Under the policy spelled out in a three-page legal memo, federal prosecutors are being told it is not a good use of their time to arrest people who use or provide medical marijuana in strict compliance with state law.

The guidelines issued by the department do, however, make it clear that federal agents will go after people whose marijuana distribution goes beyond what is permitted under state law or use medical marijuana as a cover for other crimes.

The memo advises prosecutors they "should not focus federal resources in your states on individuals whose actions are



Dr. Michael Aldrich smokes medicinal marijuana during last month's annual convention of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) in San Francisco.

in clear and unambiguous compliance with existing state laws providing for the medical use of marijuana."

The new policy is a significant departure from the Bush administration, which insisted it would continue to enforce federal anti-pot laws regardless of state codes.

"It will not be a priority to use federal resources to prosecute patients with serious illnesses

or their caregivers who are complying with state laws on medical marijuana, but we will not tolerate drug traffickers who hide behind claims of compliance with state law to mask activities that are clearly illegal," Attorney General Eric Holder said in a statement.

By the government's count, 14 states allow some use of marijuana for medical purposes: Alaska, California, Colorado,

Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington. Some medical marijuana advocates say Maryland shouldn't be included in that group, because the law there only allows for reduced penalties for medical marijuana usage.

California stands out among those for the widespread presence of dispensaries — businesses that sell marijuana and even advertise their services. Colorado also has several dispensaries, and Rhode Island and New Mexico are in the process of licensing providers, according to the Marijuana Policy Project, a group that promotes the decriminalization of marijuana use.

Advocates say marijuana is effective in treating chronic pain and nausea, among other ailments.

Holder said in March that he wanted federal law enforcement officials to pursue those who violate both federal and state law, but it has not been clear how that goal would be put into

practice. The memo spelling out the policy was sent Monday to federal prosecutors in the 14 states, and also to top officials at the FBI and Drug Enforcement Administration.

The memo written by Deputy Attorney General David Ogden emphasizes that prosecutors have wide discretion in choosing which cases to pursue, and says it is not a good use of federal manpower to prosecute those who are without a doubt in compliance with state law.

"This is a major step forward," said Bruce Mirken, communications director for the Marijuana Policy Project. "This change in policy moves the federal government dramatically toward respecting scientific and practical reality."

The change has critics, including lawmakers who see it as a tactical retreat in the fight against Mexican drug cartels.

"We cannot hope to eradicate the drug trade if we do not first address the cash cow for most drug trafficking organizations — marijuana," said Rep. Lamar Smith of Texas, the top

Republican on the House Judiciary Committee.

Administration officials said the government will still prosecute those who use medical marijuana as a cover for other illegal activity.

In particular, the memo urges prosecutors to pursue marijuana cases which involve violence, the illegal use of firearms, selling pot to minors, money laundering or involvement in other crimes.

And while the policy memo describes a change in priorities away from prosecuting medical marijuana cases, it does not rule out the possibility that the federal government could still prosecute someone whose activities are allowed under state law.

The memo, officials said, is designed to give a sense of prosecutorial priorities to U.S. attorneys in the states that allow medical marijuana. It notes that pot sales in the United States are the largest source of money for violent Mexican drug cartels, but adds that federal law enforcement agencies have limited resources.

H1NI Vaccines Run Low

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday that it anticipates 29 million doses of H1NI vaccine by the end of the month instead of the 40 million originally expected. The manufacturing process was slower than expected.

As a result, the 19,400 doses anticipated for Clark County and other southwest Washington communities this week has

been reduced to 5,000 doses.

With this smaller allocation, Public Health is limiting vaccine administration to vaccine clinics in several schools, childcare centers and the Women, Infants and Children clinic.

"It's very difficult to predict how many doses will be available in the weeks ahead. We know that this can create some frustration for healthcare pro-

viders and anxiety for people wanting to get vaccinated. All of us are waiting for vaccine supply to increase," said Dr. Alan Melnick, Region IV Health Officer.

As vaccine continues to arrive, information will be posted at FluNewsSWWashington.org. Residents can also call 877-661-4951.

Local Students Give Back

continued from Front

Just after two weeks, they gathered 200 cans from classrooms throughout the academy. They'll use them to cook up soup that will be served to needy people at Dawson Park as weather gets cold.

"I thought that people weren't really going to bring anything, but they all had a lot of cans, so they brought them," said Marlando Sparks, who was responsible for taking notes at the student group's committee meetings and making reports to the school's principal.

Naiqwan Penn and Delmody Tillman went from classroom to

classroom collecting cans. They said that the sixth grade classrooms suspected them of stealing their cans, but once they understood what they were doing they came together to work and listen.

The students leading the food drive also learned to appreciate what they have. They realized that they might not always have money to go to the mall, but they have food on the table at home, which many people don't.

"I don't like seeing people on the streets," said Daytreiona Jackson, who handled publicity for the food drive.

But the work of the school,

where many students are no strangers to hunger, won't stop with the food drive. Beginning in November, SEI will be holding a sock drive for needy people. The following month, students will partner with the Salvation Army to put together baskets of clothes, food, and toys for the month of December.

"They're not at that age when they're thinking about giving back. It's usually when they go to college and come back to the community," said Green, who was impressed by the way the students met everyday. "But they're starting now. And this particular 8th grade class is really on point."

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