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PETALING JAYA: The government will only consider marijuana for medical purposes when there is strong evidence to show its efficacy and that it is safe for use.

Deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye said pharmaceutical companies and others who wish to import the drug must show proof that it is safe and effective.

"Whether it comes in the form of tablets or oil, they must specify its usage, including the dosage," he added in a statement issued yesterday.

The cultivation of marijuana or its usage for medicinal purposes is prohibited under the Dangerous Drugs Act (DDA).

It is classified as a chemical under the DDA and possession or sale of the drug is illegal.

However, an exemption can be given for specific research purposes.

Criminologist Shahul Abd Ibrahim pointed out that marijuana, also known as cannabis, "is still a drug" and therefore can be misused regardless of its form or shape.

He said the law would have to be amended first to allow for approval for its use.

Lee and Shahul were responding to a statement by National Anti-Drugs Agency director-general Datuk Seri Zulkifli Abdullah in which he was reported to have said that cultivating marijuana was permitted with the ministry's approval.

On Dec 25 last year, Thailand's parliament approved legislation that would allow the use of marijuana for medical and research purposes.

Thailand's penalty for recreational use – up to five years in prison for possession of 10kg or less – would remain in place.