

POT TRIGGERS PSYCHOTIC SYMPTOMS

By MARIA CHENG – AP Medical Writer

LONDON(AP) New findings on marijuana's damaging effect on the brain show the drug triggers temporary psychotic symptoms in some people, including hallucinations and paranoid delusions, doctors say.

British doctors took brain scans of 15 healthy volunteers given small doses of two of the active ingredients of cannabis, as well as a placebo.

One compound, cannabidiol, or CBD, made people more relaxed. But even small doses of another component, tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, produced temporary psychotic symptoms in people, including hallucinations and paranoid delusions, doctors said.

The results, to be presented at an international mental health conference in London on Tuesday and Wednesday, provides physical evidence of the drug's damaging influence on the human brain.

"We've long suspected that cannabis is linked to psychoses, but we have never before had scans to show how the mechanism works," said Dr. Philip McGuire, a professor of psychiatry at King's College, London.

In analyzing MRI scans of the study's subjects, McGuire and his colleagues found that THC interfered with activity in the inferior frontal cortex, a region of the brain associated with paranoia.

"THC is switching off that regulator," McGuire said, effectively unleashing the paranoia usually kept under control by the frontal cortex.

In another study being presented at the conference, a two-day gathering of mental health experts discussing the connections between cannabis and mental health, scientists found that marijuana worsens psychotic symptoms of schizophrenics.

Doctors at Yale University in the U.S. tested the impact of THC on 150 healthy volunteers and 13 people with stable schizophrenia. Nearly half of the healthy subjects experienced psychotic symptoms when given the drug.