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Illinois will confine many hemp-derived THC drinks to marijuana dispensaries on Thursday

The law bars beverages with more than 0.4 milligrams of THC from bars, breweries, restaurants, many stores over youth access concerns

Wednesday, November 11, 2026

Illinois is set to sharply restrict where some hemp-derived THC drinks can be sold when the Illinois Hemp Act takes effect on Thursday, Nov. 12, a change that state lawmakers say is meant to address health concerns and keep intoxicating products away from minors.

Under the law, hemp-based THC-infused beverages containing more than 0.4 milligrams of THC will no longer be allowed for sale at restaurants, breweries, bars and many retail stores across the state. Those products are expected to be limited to licensed marijuana dispensaries instead.

The change arrives after rapid growth in the market for THC drinks, which have become a new product line for some breweries and retailers looking beyond traditional beer and other alcoholic beverages. The shift could disrupt that diversification strategy for beverage producers and distributors in Illinois and is likely to add to a broader debate over whether low-dose THC drinks should be sold in the same kinds of outlets that sell alcohol.

Supporters of the law say the existing market has expanded with too little oversight. James Swartz, a professor at the University of Illinois Chicago Jane Addams College of Social Work, told WTTW News that the lack of regulation, weak age verification and advertising that can confuse consumers have raised concerns that underage customers can easily buy intoxicating hemp products.

“Minors can come in, buy these products off the shelf,” Swartz said. “They are as intoxicating as the products sold through the licensed dispensaries.”

Lawmakers have also tied the change to federal policy. State Rep. Will Guzzardi, a Chicago Democrat who sponsored the measure, said Illinois is trying to align with federal rules that he said are expected to take effect in December and treat these hemp products as cannabis.

Guzzardi told WTTW that he would prefer a system in which low-potency THC beverages and edible products could be sold more widely than just in dispensaries, but said the coming federal framework leaves little room for that approach.

Business owners, especially smaller brewers and retailers, say the law will hit a product category that has become an important source of growth. Stephen Bossu, co-founder of Hopewell Brewing Co. in Chicago’s Logan Square neighborhood, said the company now faces the prospect of cutting jobs and abandoning its hemp-based THC drink brand, Choom.

Bossu described the change as a serious threat to a small business that had been expanding and paying down debt. He argued that compliant operators are being penalized even though they have tried to act responsibly in a market that has lacked clear state guidance.

The dispute reflects a larger split over how Illinois should handle intoxicating hemp products. Critics of the law say the answer should have been tighter rules on testing, labeling, age checks and marketing rather than moving sales almost entirely into the licensed cannabis system. Supporters say the products should never have been so widely available without the controls that already apply to marijuana sold through dispensaries.

According to a 2025 report from Whitney Economics, a consulting firm focused on the cannabis and hemp industries, hemp-based goods generate more than $2.7 billion in total revenue in Illinois and support thousands of jobs. That helps explain why the new rules have become a major issue not only for hemp companies but also for beverage makers that have used THC drinks to reach consumers who want an alternative to alcohol.

A federal lawsuit has added another layer of uncertainty. The Illinois Healthy Alternatives Association filed the case on behalf of 250 companies in the state's hemp industry, arguing that the restrictions violate the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution. As a result of that litigation, Illinois has agreed to delay enforcement of the ban for those companies until Nov. 19, when a federal judge is scheduled to hear oral arguments.

That means the law will begin affecting many businesses on Thursday, Nov. 12, while a separate group covered by the lawsuit gets a short reprieve. The staggered timeline could create confusion for consumers and sellers as the state begins enforcing the new limits.

Swartz told WTTW he expects the law to remain in place. He said the measure does not eliminate access to intoxicating products altogether, because consumers will still be able to buy them at licensed cannabis dispensaries. In his view, the law is aimed at ending the sale of unregulated hemp-derived intoxicants in convenience-style retail settings, not imposing a full prohibition.

Opponents counter that pushing the products out of bars, breweries and neighborhood shops may do little to reduce demand while damaging legitimate businesses that had built a market around low-dose drinks. Some also warn that if consumers continue to seek out those products, a narrower legal market could encourage less regulated alternatives.

For now, Illinois businesses that sell hemp-based THC drinks are preparing for a major rule change that redraws the line between the state's beverage market and its cannabis market. Brewers, bars and retailers that added THC drinks as a new revenue stream are now confronting the prospect that one of the fastest-growing categories on

their shelves will largely move to dispensaries.